A Heart's Bloom

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/58060897.

Rating:	Mature
Archive Warning:	Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Dragon Ball
Relationships:	Son Goku/Vegeta (Dragon Ball), Chi-Chi & Son Goku (Dragon Ball), Bulma Briefs & Vegeta, Bulma Briefs & Son Goku
Characters:	Vegeta (Dragon Ball), Son Goku (Dragon Ball), Bulma Briefs, Chi-Chi (Dragon Ball)
Additional Tags:	Bottom Son Goku (Dragon Ball), Top Vegeta (Dragon Ball), Hanahaki Disease, Self-Hatred, Pining, Hurt/Comfort, Angst, Fluff and Angst, vegekaka, Power Bottom, Vegeta is Bad at Feelings (Dragon Ball), Vegeta being Vegeta (Dragon Ball), Protective Vegeta (Dragon Ball)
Language:	English
Collections:	Anonymous Fics
Stats:	Published: 2024-08-10 Completed: 2024-10-28 Words: 53,033 Chapters: 10/10

A Heart's Bloom

by Anonymous

Summary

Hanahaki Disease, a rare and mysterious illness where unrequited love takes root in the victim's lungs, causing flowers to bloom and slowly choke the life out of them. The only cure? Love returned in kind, or death.

NOTE: Chapter 10 has been updated and fixed up a LOT as of November 19th. At the time of posting originally, I was going through a lot and didn't properly proof read it apparently, there were a lot of errors I didn't notice until later! And I removed things I didn't like. So please recheck it out! I hope you enjoy it.

Chapter 1

Story: A Heart's Bloom

Summary: Hanahaki Disease: a rare and mysterious illness where unrequited love takes root in the victim's lungs, causing flowers to bloom and slowly choke the life out of them. The only cure? Love returned in kind, or death.

I don't own Dragon Ball…

…

Goku didn't know when his admiration of Vegeta began to transform into something more complex. Perhaps it was the way he moved in combat with purpose and effortless grace. Maybe it was the way Vegeta's intense passion and dedication to strength drew Goku in, making him want to reach even greater heights. Or it could have been the way they challenged each other, pushed each other to their limits, and brought out the best in each other. Whatever it was, Goku found himself increasingly distracted by Vegeta's presence.

No matter how much he tried, he couldn't shake the way he was feeling about Vegeta. He tried to tell himself it was just because they were rivals, or friends, but as the more they trained together, the more he found himself admiring the way his muscles moved, how they flexed and coiled with his every move. He often caught himself staring at him, trying to figure out what was going on in his head, but he always looked so intense and focused.

He longed to touch him, to feel his warmth and strength against him. He wanted to be closer to him, to run his fingers through his hair, and to feel the power of his body. Just the thought of even holding his hand gave him a thrill.

But he knew he had to keep those feelings hidden, or else Vegeta would never want to be near him again. And the fear that Vegeta would reject him, that he'd hate him if he found out, was too much to bear.

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Eventually, the realization started to sink in for Goku. The way he felt when he was with Vegeta, how his heart quickened every time they sparred or simply talked. The strange emptiness he felt when Vegeta wasn't around. Goku began to understand that what he was feeling wasn't just admiration or rivalry, but something deeper, something that made his cheeks flush and his stomach flutter.

He was in love with Vegeta.

The simple realization brought forth a sense of shame. Goku knew that men weren't supposed to like other men. What he was feeling was wrong and unnatural. And the idea that Vegeta, who had never shown any interest in him, could never return his feelings only added to his torment.

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As time went on, Goku's feelings only grew stronger against his will. He found himself looking for any excuse to spar with Vegeta, secretly hoping for the thrill of their bodies moving together. But when Vegeta began to pull away, Goku's confusion and frustration only heightened.

He wondered if he had done something wrong, and the growing emptiness in his heart only seemed to deepen the more he longed for the prince's presence.

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The pain in Goku's chest started out small and subtle, a tightness that he tried to ignore. Each time their sparring sessions ended and they went their separate ways, a wave of loneliness washed over Goku, and the tightness in his chest worsened, as if his very soul was crying out for Vegeta's presence. The pain wasn't just physical anymore; it was as if his very being was protesting the separation. It felt like an invisible hand was squeezing his heart, making it harder to breathe.

As the days went by, the pain grew deeper, more constant, until it seemed to consume him completely. He found himself rubbing his chest, trying to ease the pain, but nothing worked. It had grown from a dull ache to a sharp, stabbing feeling, as if a cold knife was slicing through his heart; as if… his life force was tied to Vegeta's presence. Vegeta's absence was silently killing him.

…

Goku's lungs burned with every exhale, sweat dripping from his brow as he exchanged heavy blows with his rival. His heart thumped heavily in his chest, but it wasn't solely due to the exertion. Every time their gazes met, a strange feeling twisted in his gut - something he couldn't quite place.

He gritted his teeth as he was slammed into the ground by one of Vegeta's attacks.

The pain in his chest had become unbearable. Every breath was pure agony. He could barely stand up straight, but he didn't want to show it. He refused to let Vegeta see how much this was affecting him.

But as they continued to battle, Vegeta began to notice something was off with Goku. He seemed slower, more sluggish than usual.

"What's wrong with you, Kakarot?" Vegeta sneered, looking down at Goku as he lay sprawled on the ground. "Stop screwing around and fight me already. I don't have all day."

But deep down, he began to become troubled. Something was definitely wrong. The way Goku was gasping for breath and clutching at his chest…it was not normal.

"I'm *trying*… " Goku coughed, barely managing to get to his feet. He couldn't take it much more. He could feel something building up inside his chest, a painful tightness and pressure. It was getting harder and harder to fight it, and he was starting to feel lightheaded.

His vision was blurry, and his thoughts were jumbled. He tried to take a step forward, but his legs gave out beneath him, and he once again collapsed to his knees on the ground.

Vegeta's frown deepened as he watched him. He hadn't seen him like this before except back when he had the heart virus.

He took a step closer to Goku, lowering his voice. "The hell you are. Whatever's wrong, you're going to tell me. *Right now*."

Goku tried to shake his head again, but the pain was too intense. He clutched at his chest, his fingers digging into the fabric of his gi. It felt like something was clawing at his lungs.

But as Goku felt a hand against his shoulder, just the barest touch, as fleeting as a breath, his breathing began to regulate as the pain in his chest slowly faded away, replaced by a warm and comforting sensation that washed over him. It had seemed to alleviate his pain, if only for a few moments.

And that's when he realized it - Vegeta was touching him.

"I asked what's going on with you?" He repeated gruffly, his voice betraying a hint of concern despite trying to maintain his usual tough demeanor. "And don't give me some bullshit excuse. Are you sick?"

"I… I don't know." Goku didn't meet his gaze, still too weak to move much. Was Vegeta worried about him? He couldn't believe it. But it's not like it mattered. "My chest… It's been hurting a lot lately, but I think it's feeling a bit better now."

Vegeta scowled as he listened to Goku's words. He could hear the pain and exhaustion in his voice, but he knew the other saiyan was trying to remain strong. It was annoyingly stubborn, but also undeniably admirable.

He hated seeing Goku like this, and the realization of that fact made him feel a little uneasy. He had never been one to feel worry or concern for anyone before, but somehow, seeing Goku like this was bothering him.

"How long has this been going on?" He asked, his voice surprisingly soft.

"Several months now, I think... But it's usually not this bad." Goku admitted pulling his hand away from his chest as the pain subsided.

" *Several months* ?" Vegeta was stunned by that revelation. He let out a frustrated sigh, crossing his arms as he studied Goku carefully. "Why didn't you say anything?"

Goku tried to ignore the pain in his chest that returned when Vegeta pulled his hand away, but didn't protest. "I didn't want to bother you. And besides, like I said before, it's usually not this bad. I can handle it."

Vegeta huffed in irritation. "...You really are an idiot, you know that?"

He had meant it as an insult, but the words came out with more emotion than he had intended.

He paused for a moment, contemplating what to say next. He could see the pain etched on Goku's face, and it was pissing him off. *Why was he getting so worked up over this?*

But before he could say anything else, Goku spoke up suddenly.

"Your touch... It made the pain go away," he said quietly, his voice a fraction above a whisper.

"What?" For a brief moment, Vegeta's eyes widened as if he was having a hard time processing what Goku said, but it wasn't long before his usual cold demeanor returned.

"Don't be idiotic. My touch didn't do anything. You're just imagining things."

Goku felt a stinging sensation in his chest as he heard Vegeta's denial. It hurt more than he wanted to admit, but he smiled in spite of that. "Yeah, you're probably right..."

Vegeta bristled at this response. He knew Goku was trying to play nonchalant and cool, but he could see the flicker of disappointment in his eyes.

It bothered him, and he couldn't understand why. He shouldn't care about whether he hurt Goku's feelings or not. It didn't matter.

"Of course I'm right." He said coolly. "You're just being ridiculous, as usual."

There was a moment of silence as Vegeta averted his gaze, unable to look at Goku directly. He could feel a strange tightness in his chest, but he ignored it. It was just anger, that's all.

"You should probably go see a doctor or something," he said gruffly. "If your chest is hurting that badly, ignoring it won't make it better."

"Mn... Okay..." Goku tried to ignore the familiar pain creeping up on him again.

"We'll spar again later. I'm going home." Vegeta said simply.

"What? Already? But it's only been an *hour* ." Goku said, in a weaker voice than intended. Vegeta hardly even sparred with him much to *begin* with anymore. He could tolerate his feelings not being returned, on at least some level, but this was something else. All of a sudden his chest burned.

"Yeah, well, I have more important things to do than babysitting *you* all day," Vegeta snapped back, still walking away. "I've already wasted enough time as it is."

Goku's face fell further, but he didn't protest. The comment actually hurt a bit more than Goku wanted to admit.

Wasting time? Is that really how he feels about me…? I actually like being around him, though…

He knew there was no point arguing with Vegeta when he was in one of these moods. Besides, he was too distracted by the sharp pain in his chest to think straight.

"Oh. Right." He gnawed at the inside of his cheek, swallowing the lump forming in his throat as he tried his best to play it off with a smile. "I guess I'll see you later, then. Tomorrow maybe?"

"Yeah, fine." Vegeta said flippantly, not even bothering to turn around as he continued walking. "Actually, tomorrow might not work out, after all… Trunks has a field day at school tomorrow and Bulma needs me to go with him."

"Ah…" Goku wanted to ask him if he could do it after school, but it seemed Vegeta didn't want to mess with it. "Okay… Is there… maybe another day we could train instead, then?"

He knew he was probably becoming annoying, but this was important to him.

"I don't know..." Vegeta dismissed with a shrug, still not looking back at Goku. "I have a lot of stuff going on right now. My schedule is pretty packed. Besides, I'm sure you can find someone else to spar with. It's not like you need me specifically, right?"

Goku's heart sank further as he heard Vegeta's words.

"N-No… I guess not… I guess I could spar with somebody like Krillin or something," He tried to sound nonchalant, as if it didn't matter to him at all, but he couldn't hide the

disappointment and sadness in his voice.

"Yeah, whatever. Later," Vegeta replied, his tone cold and dismissive, before he finally blasted off into the sky.

Goku was left on his knees, watching Vegeta fly off into the distance. He couldn't help but once again wonder if Vegeta was purposefully keeping their meetings to a bare minimum and then saying he was busy so he wouldn't have to deal with him again for a while. Of course Goku was no expert, so he couldn't be sure. He wanted more than anything to believe that Vegeta wouldn't do that to him.

He didn't need him to return his feelings, but to practically be pushed to the side like this by somebody he admired was something else.

It actually hurt.

I'm starting to wonder if Vegeta hates me or something…

Sure, I know he can't be with me all the time or anything, but still… This is the first time in the past couple weeks that he's actually been willing to spar with me…

Did I do something to make him mad at me?

Why is my chest hurting so bad today?

The pain in his chest had returned with a vengeance, and he could hardly even breathe. Everything ached, and he felt weaker than ever before.

He leaned against a nearby tree, trying to steady himself. But suddenly, the pain in his chest intensified, and he began to cough violently.

He doubled over, gasping for air.

The coughs were deep and painful, as if he was choking on something. And then, as suddenly as the coughing fit had begun, something flew onto the ground with a soft plop.

Goku wiped at his mouth as the coughing spell subsided, staring down at the object that had fallen from his lips.

He picked it up with a tinge of confusion.

Is this a… flower petal…? But how? Why am I coughing up flowers…? Was it from something I ate?

He had no idea where it had come from or why he had coughed it up, but something deep down told him it wasn't a good sign.

He looked at it closely. It was a vibrant shade of purple, with a velvety texture.

He tried to remember if he had eaten or drunk anything that resembled this petal, but nothing came to mind.

Suddenly, the pain in his chest flared up again, and he began to cough once more.

This time, multiple flower petals flew out of his mouth, joining the first.

Goku gasped, his hands trembling as he stared down at the petals on the ground. There were more this time, each one just as beautiful as the last.

But the sight of them also filled him with dread.

What's happening to me?

As he stood there, coughing and disoriented, the realization slowly crept in. This wasn't normal, something was very wrong.

Goku clutched at his chest, the pain growing stronger with each cough. More petals spilled forth in a whirlwind of purple, dancing on the breeze before landing amongst the others on the ground.

He collapsed to his knees, tears streaming down his face as he retched and convulsed, unable to stop the flow of petals. They continued to spill from his mouth, a never-ending torrent of purple.

Until finally, some of the pain came to a halt. Even if it was only temporary, Goku couldn't have been more grateful for it.

He sat there on the ground, panting and coughing intermittently, staring at the carpet of purple petals surrounding him.

With the pain lessening, he finally had the chance to think clearly. But the only thought running through his mind was one question.

What the hell was going on?

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END CHAPTER 1…

Chapter 2

Story: A Heart's Bloom, Chapter 2

A/N: Wahh thank you so so much for the kudos and comments. I'm so happy people are enjoying this, I hope y'all will stick with me to the end. :333

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Several weeks had passed.

Goku sat at the dinner table with Chichi and Goten. They were eating a delicious meal, but Goku's appetite was next to non-existent.

He absentmindedly picked at the food on his plate, his stomach in knots. His body ached, and he felt weak and exhausted.

As he pushed the food around, he checked his phone for what must have been the millionth time, his fingers hovering over the most recent conversation thread with Vegeta.

| Goku: Yo, Vegeta, you up for a little sparring today? *(Sent On October 3rd, 4:46 PM)*

| Vegeta: Not now. I'm busy. You'll have to find somebody else. *(Received On October 4th, 2:03 PM)*

| Goku: Oh, alright, how about tomorrow then? *(Sent on October 4th, 2:04 PM)*

| Vegeta: I told you I'm busy. Go train with King Kai or something. *(Received On October 4th, 9:27 PM)*

| Goku: Aw, but King Kai has been in a grouchy mood lately because of his halo and Krillin won't have another vacation for months. You're all I've got. Come on, please? Train with me. *(Sent on October 4th, 9:29 PM)*

| Vegeta: I said no and I meant it. Now leave me alone already before I block you. *(Received on October 5th, 11:42 AM)*

| Goku: You wouldn't do that to me, would you? *(Sent on October 5th, 11:51 AM)*

| Vegeta: Try me. *(Received on October 6th, 4:58 PM)*

| Goku: You're so mean!!!! 😾 (Sent on October 6th, 4:59 PM)

| Vegeta: And you're annoying. *(Received on October 6th, 5:03 PM)*

| Goku: Come on, I just want someone to spar with. *(Sent on October 6th, 5:07 PM)*

| Vegeta: Go train on your own then. *(Received on October 7th, at 6:36 PM)*

| Goku: But it's more fun with a sparring partner. *(Seen on October 7th, 6:42 PM)*

| Goku: Pretty please? *(Seen on October 7th, 6:43 PM)*

| Goku: Can you come spar tomorrow? *(Seen on October 8th, 5:24 AM)*

| Goku: When will you be free to train again? *(Seen on October 10th, 3:21 PM)*

| Goku: Hey, look, it's cool if you've got stuff to do, but you could at least try to keep me updated. *(Delivered on October 26th, 3:21 PM)*

It was strange getting no responses from Vegeta. He knew he could be a bit of a recluse, but it had never been this long without *some* sort of reply.

Goku had seen the messages being read, but no words ever came back. He had tried everything to get Vegeta to spar with him, even resorting to begging. But clearly, nothing was working. It was as if Vegeta had completely shut him out.

Feeling the familiar sensation rising in the back of his throat, he let out a frustrated sigh, putting his phone down on the table with a little more force than necessary.

"Everything alright, Goku?" Chichi had stopped eating and was looking at him with slight concern in her eyes. "You've barely touched your food."

Goku forced a smile, trying to act nonchalant. "Oh, uh, Yeah, I'm okay. Just not feeling all that hungry right now, that's all."

He gave an awkward chuckle, hoping that would satisfy her inquisitiveness. He didn't want to worry her anymore than he already had.

Chichi hummed in mild disbelief but didn't press any further. She could tell there was something amiss, but she knew Goku well enough to know he wouldn't spill his thoughts easily.

Instead, she just nodded. "Alright, but at least drink try to something. You'll get dehydrated."

"Yeah, I will," Goku agreed, knowing he couldn't argue with her logic.

He picked up his glass and took a few sips, the water helping to alleviate his dry throat. But as he sipped at the water, he felt the familiar scratching sensation in his throat again. He tried to ignore it, but the aching only seemed to worsen. The water felt like sandpaper on his raw throat, making him grimace in discomfort.

Chichi noticed his grimace, her concern growing. "Goku, are you sure you're feeling alright? You look like you're in pain…"

Goku immediately shook his head. The last thing he needed was her worrying about him even more.

"Oh, uh, something got stuck in my throat, but it's all gone now." He stood up, grabbing his phone. "...Hey, listen, I think I'm gonna go out and do some work on the farm for a little while. I need to clear my head a bit. I'll be back later. "

Chichi watched him go, still not fully convinced, but deciding to give him some space.

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Goku hurried out of the house, his steps quick and rushed. Once he was outside, he let out a sigh and leaned against the wall, taking a moment to just breathe, the air filling his lungs and offering a brief moment of respite from the pain. But as he inhaled, a sharp pain shot through his chest and his throat constricted.

A coughing fit was building, and he knew it wouldn't be long before the flowers returned.

Goku stumbled some ways away from the house, trying to find a secluded spot before the coughing started again. He doubled over, his body heaving with violent coughs as the disease took over.

He could practically feel the flowers wriggling up his throat, ready to be expelled once more.

He collapsed to his knees, the grass and dirt around him becoming speckled with a sea of purple as he coughed up petal after petal, a few whole flowers mixed in this time.

Each cough was like a stabbing pain in his throat and chest, making it hard to breathe. He gasped and wheezed for air, his eyes tearing up from the exertion. When the coughing eventually subsided, he was left trembling and drained.

He looked down at the pile of flowers around him, their silky petals mockingly beautiful. They seemed to whisper a constant reminder that the disease was still taking its toll on his body.

He leaned back against the trunk of a tree, closing his eyes for only a moment. Taking a deep breath, he finally pushed himself back upright. His chest still ached, but the urge to cough had subsided for now.

He glanced around to make sure no one had seen him. The last thing he needed was to worry Chichi even more.

With grim determination, he began making his way toward the fields. Work would help take his mind off things.

He reached the edge of the fields and began trudging through the soft earth. The familiar scent of turned soil and the hum of insects filled the air, providing a sense of routine that usually calmed him.

But today, even the serenity of the farm couldn't fully soothe the unease in his heart.

He picked up a hoe and set to work weeding a row of broccoli. It was monotonous, physical labor, which usually was enough to focus his mind and drive away thoughts of anything else.

But as he worked, the memory of Vegeta's conversation thread with him and the flowers he'd just coughed up was like a persistent buzzing in the back of his mind.

The sun beat down on him as he labored on. Sweat dripped from his brow, stinging his eyes, but he barely noticed. Every pull of a weed, every turn of the soil was automatic, his body going through the motions while his mind was somewhere else entirely.

With each pull of a weed, the ache in his chest seemed to pulse a little harder. He tried to ignore it, focusing all his effort on simply doing the work. He couldn't let himself stop, not now.

The work kept him occupied, and gave him a momentary distraction. But as the hours passed, his energy began to dwindle.

Each movement became a little more strained, each step a little more labored. He tried to push past the weariness, to keep going for just a little longer.

But his body could only do so much, and he found himself having to stop to catch his breath more frequently.

It wasn't long before the sun was sinking lower on the horizon, painting the sky in shades of orange and purple. The light was fading, making it harder to see the crops and weeds.

Goku glanced up at the darkening sky. He knew he should probably call it a day and head back to the house soon, but he was reluctant to stop. The quiet solitude and the toil of farm work was the only thing grounding him right now.

Until all of a sudden, Goku heard the familiar chime from his phone, pulling him from his thoughts. He took it out and checked the screen, his heart skipping a beat as he saw the sender.

Vegeta.

Without thinking, he immediately tapped on the notification to view the message.

| Vegeta: You really need to stop sending me so many messages. I told you it's annoying. I'll message you when I'm ready. Besides, the last time I saw you, you could barely stand up. If you aren't capable of fighting at your full power, then what's the point? *(Received on October 27th, 6:08 PM)*

Goku frowned as he read the words. Vegeta's cold and dismissive tone stung, especially after having been ignored for so long.

He felt a lump forming in his throat, running a shaky hand through his messy hair.

"What's the point, huh?" he muttered to himself. "It's not always about fighting, ya know?"

Stupid Vegeta...

Trying to keep his emotions in check, he clicked his phone off and jammed it back into his pocket, feeling the anger and exhaustion bubbling up inside him.

He tried to turn his attention back to weeding the farm, his motions hard and agitated as he tore at the stubborn weeds. Each pull was like a release valve for the frustration and pain welling up inside him.

The ache in his chest and throat grew more pronounced, the pain exacerbated by the emotions raging in his heart.

He paused for a moment, taking a deep breath to try and clear his head. But it didn't help. The lump in his throat only seemed to tighten.

The sky was reaching nightfall, but Goku barely noticed. He was in his own little world now, caught between the pain, the anger, and the overwhelming loneliness.

With one final, vicious pull of a weed, Goku's body was wracked with another coughing fit. His condition had pounced at the sudden spike in emotion, forcing out less petals and more flowers this time.

They were bloody and bitter, staining his hands and leaving a metallic taste in his mouth.

I'm bleeding… This can't be happening…

He couldn't breathe, he couldn't think, all he could do was cough and cough, the cycle seemingly endless.

The pain was a hot lance through his chest, making his vision swim and his knees buckle. He dropped the weeding tool and fell to his knees, clutching at his throat in desperation.

The coughing tore at him like razors. He tried to force air into his lungs, but it was a constant struggle, his vision going dark around the edges, as whatever this virus was had its way with him.

The coughing slowly subsided, but the pain and breathlessness remained. Blood trickled from the corners of his mouth, and his throat felt raw and tender.

He sat there for a long moment, gasping and trying to catch his breath. The ground beneath him was cold and wet, his clothes and hands stained red.

All of a sudden, Goku's head snapped up as he heard a soft frightened voice break the silence.

"Dad...?"

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A/N: I'm just trying to get past the build up. I'll bring Vegeta back in a couple chapters!!! :DDD

Chapter 3

Story: A Heart's Bloom, Chapter 3.

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Goku's head snapped around as he heard a soft voice break the silence

He looked up and saw Goten standing a few feet away, a small, trembling figure silhouetted against the descending sun.

Goten’s eyes were wide with worry as he took in his father’s predicament. He was holding a furoshiki filled with bento boxes. No doubt Chichi had sent him here.

"G-Goten…" Goku choked out, his voice rough and hoarse. He hadn’t heard his son approach. How long had the boy been standing there? How much had he seen?

Goten hesitated, unsure of how to proceed. He could see the blood on Goku's clothes, the petals scattered around him, and the look of pain and exhaustion etched on his father's face.

A part of him wanted to run away, to pretend he hadn't seen any of this.

But another part, a stronger part, pushed him forward. He dropped the furoshiki, unconcerned with the bento boxes spilling out onto the ground as he approached his father.

"What's wrong, Dad? Why were you coughing up flowers…?" Goten took a hesitant step closer, his gaze flickering briefly to the blood staining Goku's clothes.

"...Goten, I..." Goku's voice was gruff and strained, the words scraping against his raw throat. He struggled to find the right words, the right explanations. He didn't have the energy to come up with a believable lie, but if he couldn't even begin to *explain* to himself what was happening, how was he supposed to make his son understand it?

"I need you… to listen to me… I'm…" Reaching out, he shakily touched the side of Goten's cheek in an attempt to wipe away some of the tears that were falling. But then he pulled back when he realized he was smearing blood on him. "Your daddy's sick. Really sick. And I don't know what's causing it, exactly, but it's... it's been making me cough up things like that."

He gestured to the petals and blood scattered around him.

Goten's eyes widened further, his small frame tensing in surprise.

"You're...sick?" he repeated, the word sounding like a curse in his mouth.

"Y-yeah..." Goku forced a weak smile, but it faltered beneath the weight of his own helplessness, as he tried to sound reassuring. He rubbed a hand against his shoulder, forcing a smile. "But hey, look, it's nothing for you to worry about, okay…? I just *know* it'll pass soon..."

"Are you sure…?" Goten swallowed hard, his small face pinched with worry. He looked like he wanted to argue, to demand answers that Goku simply didn't have. The sight of his usually cheerful son looking so frightened was heartbreaking. He never wanted his children to see him like this.

"Yeah, I-" The conversation was cut abruptly short as another coughing fit started to bubble up in Goku's chest. He doubled over, his body shuddering with the force of the retching.

The metallic taste of blood soon filled his mouth, mixing with the acrid flavor of the petals. This time it was worse than the previous fit, the pain sharper and more intense, each cough feeling like it was tearing his throat apart.

Through the veil of pain and the ringing in his ears, he heard Goten let out a gasp. The boy was standing there, frozen with fearful disbelief.

As the coughing continued, Goku heard a sniffle followed by a small voice.

"D-dad..."

He managed to look up from the ground, the pain momentarily forgotten in his surprise. Goten had taken a step closer and was now wrapping his small arms around Goku's body, holding onto him like a lifeline.

"I'm… I'm gonna fly you back home to mom," Goten said, his voice shaking but determined. "You're hurt and... and you need her help."

Goku shook his head weakly, trying to protest. "No... no, I'm fine. You don't have to-"

Another coughing fit cut off his words, the petals and blood spilling from his lips. He tasted iron and bitterness, the world spinning around him as oxygen escaped his lungs.

"No, you're not fine!" Goten cried, tears running down his cheeks. "You're hurt and bleeding! You need help!"

His small hands gripped Goku's clothes, his body trembling against him.

Goku wanted to argue, to tell his son that everything was okay and he could handle this himself. But the words wouldn't come, his throat and mouth clogged with the aftereffects of his coughing fit.

He was too weak, too tired to full process the feeling of his son lifting him up.

The flight back home was a blur of sensations. There was the cool evening air against his skin, the sound of Goten's strained breaths as he struggled to support Goku's weight, the distant lights of the house getting closer.

But the pain and exhaustion dulled his senses, making everything feel like a dream.

After sitting him down next to the door, Goten hovered just beside him, covered in blood, his face tear-streaked and filled with worry. He was panting from the exertion of flying with Goku, his breath coming in short gasps.

"J-just stay right here," he said quietly, the small command a stark contrast to the usual cheerful tone. "I'm gonna go get Mom."

Goku wanted to argue, to say that he could handle this himself. But he could barely find the strength to nod. His body felt like it was made of stone, the exhaustion and pain overwhelming his usually indomitable will.

He heard Goten's soft footsteps recede into the house, the sound of his voice calling out for Chichi ringing through the air.

Goku closed his eyes, letting out a pained breath. The cool night air against his skin and the soft sound of crickets filling the silence.

The wait was agony. Each second felt like an hour, each passing moment filled with the pain, the exhaustion, and the overwhelming sense of helplessness.

Goku tried to keep his breathing steady, his mind too weary to focus on something other than the ache in his chest and throat.

He could hear whispers and soft footsteps coming from the house, hushed voices carrying through the open door. They sounded tense, worried... and he could hear the fear in Chichi's voice above the others.

Before his mind could linger on the voices long enough to make out the words, the door slid open with a rattle.

Chichi stepped outside, her face paler than usual. Her eyes flickered with worry as she looked down at him, her movements quick and efficient as she knelt down beside him.

"You idiot," she muttered, her voice shaking. "Why didn't you tell me you were sick? Look at you, you're a mess."

She ran her fingers through his hair gently, her touch a mix of affection and worry. Goku tried to speak, to reassure her, but another cough caught in his throat.

Chichi's eyes widened in alarm as the cough wracked through him, petals and blood spilling from his lips. She was quick to act, leaning him forward and gently patting his back.

"Shhh, just breathe," she whispered, her voice tight with worry. "Just do your best to breathe."

Goku could feel Chichi's presence like a lifeline. He focused on the sound of her voice and the feel of her hand against his back, using it as an anchor as he rode out the coughing fit.

Slowly, it finally subsided, leaving Goku slumped against Chichi, his body weak and trembling. Despite her comfort, a small part of him could not help but yearn for another presence.

His mind kept going back to Vegeta, the words of the earlier text echoing in his mind.

The memory of their previous interactions haunted him, the cold, detached tone of Vegeta's messages like another dagger in his chest. He wanted to push aside the thoughts, to focus on the comfort Chichi was trying to provide.

Chichi was speaking, her voice soft and soothing, but he only caught fragments of her words. Something about taking him to a hospital, which he instinctively protested to.

"No, no hospital. I can't-" He immediately became strangled, as the inevitable happened once more.

Sensing his panic, Chichi then said something else. Something about needing to get him inside and clean him up.

He heard the pain and worry in her voice, the fear for his safety. It only made him feel more guilty. He knew he should reassure her, to tell her he would be okay.

But the lie stuck in his throat, refusing to come out.

As Chichi helped him to his feet, his legs trembled like a newborn fawn. His body felt heavy, weaker than it had ever been.

The short walk back into the house felt like a marathon, each step sending pain and dizziness spinning through him.

Chichi led him straight to the bathroom, her arm around his waist to support him. The cool tile felt stark against his heated skin, a jarring contrast to the pain that still ached in his chest and throat.

She settled him down on the edge of the bathtub, her expression stern but her touch gentle. Chichi's eyes flickered briefly to the petals and blood staining his clothes, and he could see the worry and fear there.

She began to unbutton his shirt, her movements efficient and practiced. Despite their divorce, she still knew how to care for him better than anyone else. There was a familiarity in her touch that went beyond marriage, a bond forged out of years of shared history and understanding.

Goku let her undress him without protest, his body too weakened to protest. He leaned against the cool edge of the tub, his mind still swimming in pain.

Chichi tossed his ruined shirt into a nearby hamper, her expression never leaving his face. Her eyes scanned over his body for a moment, taking in the sweat and pallor of his skin, the trembling muscles and rapid breathing.

Chichi knelt down beside him, her hands moving to unbuckle his pants. She was gentle as she removed them, her touch never lingering in any one place for too long. Despite the situation, he couldn't help the small shiver that ran through him as the cool air hit his bare legs.

Chichi grabbed a cloth nearby and began to clean the blood and sweat from his skin. Her gaze was focused, her movements efficient. But he could see the concern in her eyes as she cleaned him, the worry etched in every line of her face.

As she worked, Goku tried to focus on her and the sensation of the cloth gliding across his skin. But his mind kept drifting back to Vegeta, the thoughts of the Saiyan and the unknown disease swirling in his head like a dark storm.

Chichi finished cleaning the blood from his skin, tossing the cloth into the hamper with the stained shirt. She looked over him for a moment, her eyes taking in the paleness of his skin and the way he was slumped against the tub.

She gently patted his shoulder, her touch like a small comfort amidst the chaos of his thoughts.

"Stay here," she said quietly, her voice breaking through the silence. "I'm going to get you some clean clothes."

Goku nodded silently, unable to find the words to speak. His throat felt raw and sore, each breath sending a sharp pain through his chest.

Chichi left the room silently, her footsteps soft against the tiled floor. Goku was left alone, the silence of the bathroom like a vacuum of sound. He could hear his own breathing, ragged and labored, the only noise in the eerily quiet room.

In the solitude, his mind started to wander once again. He thought of Vegeta, the cold text messages seared into his mind. He wanted to understand why Vegeta had been avoiding him, why the other Saiyan never had time for him anymore. The pain in his chest and throat felt like a physical reflection of the pain in his heart.

He closed his eyes, trying to will the thoughts away. But the memories played like a broken record in his head, the echoes of past conversations haunting him. The pain in his chest and throat felt like a physical manifestation of the heartache he'd been feeling.

The sound of Chichi returning with a fresh change of clothes snapped him back to reality.

She set them down nearby, her eyes taking in his slumped form.

"Here, let's get you dressed," she said, her voice soft but firm. She picked up the top from the pile of clothes and helped him put it on, her touch gentle but efficient.

Goku let her dress him, his body feeling heavy and uncooperative. Each movement sent a spike of pain through his chest and throat, the exhaustion and the sickness making it feel like he was moving through thick syrup.

Chichi carefully buttoned the shirt, before moving to his pants. He helped her as best as he could, his movements slow and clumsy compared to her efficiency. Each inch felt like a mile,

his body so weak and tired it was all he could do just to sit upright.

When he was finally dressed, Chichi stepped back, her hands on her hips. She looked him over once more, her eyes taking in every detail of his exhausted form. Despite her worry, there was a hint of resignation in her expression, a knowledge that he was stubborn and headstrong.

She took a deep breath, her hands dropping to her sides. "You're staying here tonight," she said firmly, her voice leaving no room for argument. "You need rest and I'm not letting you go anywhere until you're better."

Goku wanted to protest, to tell her he could take care of himself. But his throat was raw and painful, each breath making him want to cough. And the expression on her face told him she was not going to accept any arguments.

So he nodded, swallowing back the protest that was on the tip of his tongue. The thought of fighting with her over this made him even more tired than he felt already.

Chichi helped him walk down the hallway to the bedroom, her presence a steady and reassuring force beside him. As they walked, she spoke up again, her voice soft but firm.

"Are you hungry? I sent Goten with several bento boxes earlier, but I wasn't sure if you had eaten any of it." She asked, her gaze flickering to his face.

Goku felt guilty at the mention of the bento boxes, remembering that Goten had dropped them, but his stomach churned at the thought of food.

He knew he *should* feel hungry – he hadn't eaten much of anything all day – but the thought of stuffing something down his already sore throat was repulsive.

He shook his head silently, not trusting himself to speak.

Chichi seemed to understand his response, her eyes narrowing slightly as she took in his reaction. She didn't seem surprised by his lack of appetite, but there was a hint of worry in her expression.

"You should still try to eat something," she said, her voice gentle but firm. "Even if it's just a few bites. You need your strength to fight off whatever this is."

"It hurts too much to swallow... cuz of how much I've been coughing… The flowers…" Goku looked away. He hated worrying her, but he couldn't help it.

Chichi's expression softened, a hint of understanding in her eyes.

"I know…," she said softly, her voice filled with empathy. "But you still need something on your stomach, even if it's just something small. Maybe… maybe I can find something else that will be easier on your throat? Some soup?"

Goku could only nod silently in response, the thought of eating anything making his stomach turn. No matter how much he wanted to avoid it, he knew Chichi was right.

Chichi gently guided him further into the bedroom, helping him sit down on the edge of the bed. She gave him a final reassuring pat on the shoulder before stepping back.

"Alright, just rest," she said quietly. "I'll go make something for you to eat."

Goku nodded silently as she left, lying back onto the pillows with a huff of pain and exhaustion. His closed his eyes, trying to find some comfort in the familiar scent of the bedding. Chichi always made sure everything in the house was clean, looking after and replacing his bedding when it got dirty.

It was nice.

The minutes ticked by slowly, each one feeling like an hour, but at long last, a knock on his bedroom door interrupted his thoughts.

"Goku? Honey, I've got something for you. Do you mind if I come in?" Chichi's concerned voice came from the other side of the door.

"Y-yeah..." He managed to croak out, wincing as the words scraped against his raw throat.

The door opened slowly, Chichi's footsteps padding across the room. He forced himself to open his eyes, offering a small smile onto his face when he saw her.

Chichi was carrying a bowl of soup in her hand, the steam wafting up from the hot liquid as she sat down on the edge of the bed next to him.

"How are you feeling?" She murmured, her voice soft.

"I'm fine, just tired..." Goku murmured, his voice weak and raspy.

She didn't seem convinced by his response, but she didn't push the matter. "I made one of your favorites, miso soup. It's light and easy on the stomach and I also added some ginger to help soothe your throat."

He could smell it in the soup, the sharp, spicy scent slightly overriding the scent of the miso. It didn't make him want to gag quite as badly as the miso soup alone, but the thought of eating anything still made him feel nauseous. He knew she was trying to help. "Thanks, Chichi…"

"Of course," She replied softly, her hand reaching out to gently rest on his forehead. She was checking his temperature, although he didn't feel hot to the touch. Her touch was a gentle

comfort, grounding him in the midst of his pain and exhaustion.

"You still feel a bit clammy," she said, her voice barely above a murmur. She let her hand linger on his forehead a moment longer before pulling it back. "I wish you had told me how bad it was before."

He closed his eyes again, not replying. He knew she was right, he should have told her sooner. Maybe if he had, it would have prevented everything from getting this bad. But he'd been stubborn, trying to deal with it on his own, and now he was paying the price.

She didn't push the matter, knowing him well enough to know it would be useless. Instead, she picked up the bowl of soup again and held it out to him.

"Here, sit up for me. You need to eat something," she said quietly. "It doesn't have to be a lot. Just a few spoonfuls."

Chichi brought the spoon to his lips, the warm liquid of the soup coating his tongue. The taste was strong, the ginger almost overpowering the miso. Each spoonful was a struggle. He felt as if he was forcing the soup down, the effort leaving him even more exhausted. But Chichi continued to feed him, her other hand providing a gentle pressure on the back of his neck to help keep him sitting upright.

As Chichi continued to feed him, the sound of footsteps padded down the hallway towards the bedroom. The door creaked open slowly, revealing Goten's small frame. The young boy's face was troubled, his eyes filled with worry.

He had changed clothes since earlier, probably because of the blood that Goku had gotten on him.

"Is...is Dad gonna be alright?" Goten's voice was small and shaky, the sight of his father so weak and unwell clearly troubling him deeply.

Chichi looked up from feeding Goku, her expression softening as she looked at Goten. She tried to give him a reassuring smile, but it didn't quite reach her eyes.

"He's going to be fine, sweetie," she said, her voice soft. "He's just not feeling very well right now."

Goten nodded, but he didn't look any less worried. He shifted from foot to foot, his bottom lip still quivering. "Can I… Can I stay here with him?" he asked quietly.

Chichi's expression softened further, and she placed a hand on Goten's shoulder.

"Of course, sweetie," she said, her voice gentle. "I think your father would like that. Just… Just don't stay up too late, okay? You have school tomorrow."

Goten nodded again, his expression brightening slightly at her words.

"Okay," he said. He moved around to the other side of the bed, climbing up onto the mattress beside Goku.

Goku watched him with a mixture of fondness and exhaustion as Goten settled himself next to him. The young boy snuggled close, his small body pressing up against Goku's side. Despite his exhaustion, Goku managed to lift his arm and rest it around Goten's shoulders, pulling him closer.

Chichi watched the exchange with a small smile, her eyes softening further at the sight of father and son snuggled up together.

"You two get some rest now," she said quietly. "I'll be just down the hall if you need me."

Goku nodded in response, shifting a bit to get more comfortable. With Goten snuggled against him and Chichi's presence providing comfort and reassurance, he felt a small bit of

tension ease from his body.

Chichi left the room after giving them both one last small smile, closing the door quietly behind her. Goku and Goten were left alone in the room, the silence broken only by their breathing and the occasional shuffling of bed sheets.

Goten snuggled closer to Goku's side, his small hand resting on his chest. He could feel the steady beating of his father's heart under his fingers, a comforting reminder that despite how sick he looked, he was still alive.

"Hey, Dad?" Goten's voice cut through the silence, small and uncertain. "Are you really gonna be okay? Like, for real this time?"

Goku looked down at his son, seeing the worry and fear in his eyes. He forced a smile, lifting his hand to ruffled Goten's hair.

"Of course, I will," he said, his voice still weak and scratchy. "I might be down for a bit, but I'll get better soon. Don't worry about me, okay?"

Goten nodded, but he didn't look convinced. He was silent for a few moments, before his small voice spoke up again.

"When you were coughing up flowers earlier, it was kind of scary," he admitted. "I didn't know that could happen."

Goku's smile faltered, a pang of guilt going through him at the fear in his son's voice and knowing that he was the cause of it.

He hadn't wanted to scare Goten, but he hadn't been able to stop the coughing fit.

"Yeah, I hear what you mean…" Goku's expression tightened, his mind racing. He wanted to reassure his son, but he didn't know how to do that when he didn't have an answer himself. He laughed, trying to play it off as a joke. "To tell you the truth, I actually didn't know myself. I'm not sure why this is happening."

Goten was silent for a few moments, his small fingers fiddling with the bed sheets. His expression was contemplative, as if he was trying to come up with a solution to this problem. And then, his small voice spoke up again. "Maybe you could ask Ms. Bulma. She's really smart, right? Maybe she would know something."

Goku blinked in surprise, not having expected his son to suggest that. But he supposed the suggestion made sense. Bulma was one of the smartest people he knew. If anyone was likely to have some insight on this weird illness, it was her.

"You think...?" he said slowly, mulling over the suggestion. "I guess I could ask her... That's actually not a bad idea... Thanks, Goten."

Goten smiled, looking pleased that he'd been able to offer a solution. But then his expression became worried again.

"But..." he said, his voice very small. "What if Ms. Bulma *doesn't* know… what are you gonna do then?"

Goku's heart ached at the worry in his son's voice. He wanted so badly to reassuring him, to tell him everything would be okay. But he also didn't want to lie to him, not about something this serious.

"Hmm… I haven't really thought that far ahead yet. But I'll figure something out. I'll find a way to get better, no matter what it takes."

Goten bit his lip, and snuggled closer to Goku's side, his small body pressing against his father's.

"You promise?" he asked, his voice barely above a whisper.

Goku wrapped his arm around his son tighter, pulling him close.

"I promise," he said, his voice as firm and resolute as he could make it. "I'll get better, for both you and for your mom. I'm not going anywhere."

Goten let out a small sigh of relief, his body relaxing just a bit at his father's words. For now, he seemed satisfied with the answer. He snuggled closer, his head resting on his father's chest, right above his heart. "Goodnight, Dad."

"Goodnight, son." Goku kept his arm around Goten, holding his son close as the young boy's steady breathing provided a small measure of comfort.

Despite the pain and the exhaustion, Goku found his mind drifting away from all the questions and confusion. For now, he just wanted to rest, to have this moment with his son. Tomorrow, he would ask Bulma for help. But for now, he just wanted to rest his eyes…

Slowly, sleep claimed him, his body relaxing and his breathing deepening as exhaustion won out. The last sound he heard before he dropped into unconsciousness was the soft, steady breathing of the young child against him, and the quiet rhythm of his own heartbeat in his ears.

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END OF CHAPTER 3

Chapter 4

Story: A Heart's Bloom , ***Chapter 4***

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When Goku woke up, his body felt heavy. It took him a moment to remember what had happened, but as soon as the memories came back, he let out a soft groan, the events of the previous day replaying through his mind.

He felt a small weight against him, and he looked down to see Goten still asleep, his small body snuggled up against his side. The sight of his son, sleeping peacefully, brought a small smile to Goku's face, despite how lousy he felt.

But he also felt an ache in his bladder, signaling that he needed to get up to use the bathroom. With a slight grimace, he slowly and carefully started to extract himself from his son's grasp.

Goten stirred slightly as his father moved, letting out a small mumble of protest at the movement. But he didn't wake properly, his grip loosening enough that Goku was able to carefully slide out of bed.

He steadied himself against the bedside table as he got to his feet. The room swayed slightly around him, a wave of dizziness washing through him. He grit his teeth against the sensation, waiting for it to pass.

Once the dizziness faded, he forced himself to take a step forward. His legs felt wobbly and uncoordinated, and he had to concentrate hard to keep himself from falling. But he managed to make it to the door of the room without too much difficulty.

He stumbled his way across the hall towards the bathroom, each step an effort in itself. His whole body ached and his limbs felt like lead. But eventually, he managed to reach the

bathroom, practically stumbling inside and closing the door behind him.

Once he'd finished in the bathroom, he slowly made his way out of the bathroom, only to find Chichi waiting for him in the hallway.

Chichi looked at him with concern, taking in his pallor and the way he leaned heavily against the wall. "You look terrible," she said, her voice soft. "Did you get enough sleep?"

Goku gave her a wry smile, leaning heavily on the wall for support.

"Yeah, I slept alright," he said, his voice still rough and scratchy. "But I feel like crap."

"You shouldn't be out of bed," she chastised gently, folding her arms. "You need to rest and let your body recover."

"I know," Goku protested lightly. "But I needed to use the bathroom. Besides, I can't just stay in bed all day. I need to move around a bit.

Chichi shook her head, gently steering him back towards their bedroom.

"You're too stubborn for your own good, you know that…?" she said, a hint of fond exasperation in her voice, before sighing. "But alright. Just promise me you'll take it easy, alright? No overexerting yourself."

Goku nodded, managing a small smile despite his exhaustion. "I promise."

Eventually, they reached the bedroom, and Chichi helped him back into bed. She fussed over him for a few moments, adjusting the blankets and helping him sit up against the pillows. Goku let her without complaint, knowing that she was just trying to take care of him.

Goten who was lying next to Goku, shifted slightly in his sleep.

Chichi's eyes softened as she looked down at Goku and Goten, the two of them side by side on the bed. She reached out and stroked Goten's hair gently, a fond smile on her face.

"You know," she said quietly, "I'm glad Goten's been able to spend so much time with you lately. I think having you around has been good for him."

Goku smiled at her words, his own gaze falling to Goten. "Yeah," he said quietly. "It has been nice having him around. He's a good kid."

Goten shifted again, his small face scrunching up as he started to wake up properly. His eyes blinked open, and he yawned widely, his little body stretching beneath the blankets.

"Morning, buddy," Goku said, his voice still rough. "Time to get up for school."

Goten looked up at him, his sleep-mussed hair falling into his eyes.

"Do I have to...?" he complained, pouting.

Chichi gave him a stern look. "Yes, you do," she said firmly. "You can't skip school just because your dad's a little sick. Now come on, up you go."

"Fine..." Goten let out a small sigh, knowing there was no way he was getting out of school today. He reluctantly sat up in bed, rubbing his eyes and yawning again.

Chichi smiled, ruffling his hair.

"That's my good boy." She said, before turning her attention back to Goku. "I'll get Goten ready. You just stay here and get some rest, okay?"

Goku nodded, sinking back against the pillows. His eyelids were starting to feel heavy again, the strain he had put on his body yesterday from all the coughing starting to catch up to him. "Alright."

Chichi left the room, taking Goten with her. For a few moments, silence fell over the room. Goku watched the door close behind them, the quiet settling around him. He closed his eyes, trying not to focus on the pain and exhaustion. He knew he had to rest, to let his body recover. But his mind was restless, his thoughts swirling around like a tempest. The knowledge that he was sick, the unknown cause of his illness… it was hard to ignore.

The sound of footsteps in the hallway signaled Chichi and Goten's return. Goku opened his eyes as the door opened again, revealing Chichi and Goten, the young boy dressed in his school uniform with his backpack slung over his shoulder.

"Well, Goten's ready for school," Chichi said, allowing Goten to walk over to him. "He just wants to say goodbye to you before he heads out."

Goku looked at Goten, a small smile pulling at his lips.

"Aww, of course he can," he said, holding out his arms. "Come here."

Goten approached the bed eagerly, the prospect of having to go to school momentarily pushed from his mind. He clambered up onto the bed, crawling up beside Goku and snuggling into his side.

Goku put his arm around him, pulling him close. "Be good at school today, alright?" he said, giving Goten a gentle squeeze.

Goten nodded, his small face scrunching up in determination.

"I will," he said, his voice firm.

Goku chuckled slightly, the sight of his son's serious expression making him smile. He ruffled Goten's hair affectionately.

"Good," he said. "And don't cause any trouble for your teacher, okay?"

"I won't, Dad…" Goten protested, looking offended at the very idea that he'd misbehave in school.

Chichi chuckled.

"Alright, Goten," she said. "Let your father get some rest now, okay? We don't want to tire him out too much."

Goten pouted but nodded, turning to give Goku one last hug. "Bye, Dad."

"Bye, son." Goku said, returning the hug. "I'll see you later, okay?"

Goten nodded, a hint of reluctance in his expression. He clearly didn't want to leave his bedridden father, but he was too obedient to protest.

After a few moments, Goten clambered off the bed and Chichi took his hand.

"Alright, come on, you need to head off or you'll be late." Chichi said gently, steering Goten towards the door.

Goten looked back at Goku as he was led out of the room, his small face filled with concern. Goku gave him a reassuring smile, giving him a small wave.

"Hey, don't worry about me," he said. "I'll be fine. You just focus on school."

"Okay..." Goten said quietly, still looking reluctant to leave. But he didn't protest further, allowing Chichi to lead him out of the room and down the hallway.

Once the door closed behind them, the room was silent again. Goku let out a small sigh, his exhausted body sinking deeper into the bed. The simple act of saying goodbye to his son had drained him, the effort it had taken to appear as if everything was okay feeling like a Herculean task.

His eyes slid closed once more, his body feeling as heavy as lead. The silence of the room was almost deafening, the only sounds being his labored breathing and the steady pounding of his heartbeat that he somehow could hear loud and clear.

The pain in his chest hadn’t subsided either, the familiar sharpness still present and now it felt as if there were thorns in his lungs. He winced, shifting slightly in a futile attempt to find a position where the pain might ease a bit.

But it didn’t help. The pain remained, a persistent and uncomfortable reminder of his current condition. Goku let out a hiss of breath through gritted teeth, his hands clenching into tight fists around the bedsheets.

Goku's mind started to wander as he lay there, his thoughts shifting back to his conversation with Goten from the night before. The young boy's words echoed in his mind.

"Maybe you could ask Ms. Bulma. She's really smart, right? Maybe she would know something."

The thought caught his attention, and he began to consider the idea more seriously. Perhaps Goten was right. Maybe Bulma would know something. She was a scientist and had a sharp mind, afterall.

He mulled it over in his head, his mind weighing the pros and cons. On one hand, he didn't want to worry Bulma unnecessarily. On the other hand, he was desperate to find out what was wrong with him. This illness was strange and alarming, and he needed it to stop.

He groaned, his brain going round in circles with indecision.

The pain in his chest flared up again, however, sending a jolt of pain through his body. He jerked reflexively, a hiss of breath escaping through his gritted teeth.

That decided it, he thought. If the pain and illness didn't stop soon, they might kill him. There was nothing left to do but ask for help.

Willing himself to open his eyes, he sat up against the pillows. A wave of dizziness hit him as he shifted, but he fought through it, gritting his teeth against the nausea that threatened to consume him.

He glanced at the bedside table, spotting his phone on its surface. It wasn't out of his reach, but it was hard to grab it with his limbs feeling as heavy as they did.

He grunted, his hand groping for the bedside table. His fingers brushed against the smooth surface, but he couldn't quite reach his phone. He cursed under his breath, his frustration mounting. He was starting to feel like a useless invalid, unable to do something as simple as grab his own damn phone.

He tried again, stretching out his arm as far as he could. He managed to grab the edge of the table, but it caused another wave of pain to shoot through his body, his chest spasming and his coughing reflex triggered. His hand jerked away from the table, and his body twisted into a coughing fit.

Each cough wracked his body with pain, his chest feeling as if someone was stabbing him with a thousand knives, leaving Goku slumped against the pillows, his body shaking and his breath coming in ragged gasps. He squeezed his eyes shut, trying to grit past the pain.

When he eventually opened his eyes again, he found that he was once covered in a scattering of blood-streaked petals from the flowers he had coughed up. Their sweet, pungent smell hung thick in the air.

Disgust and dread coiled in his gut at the sight of the petals. They were a constant reminder of the sickness that was afflicting him, a bizarre and inexplicable illness that he couldn't make sense of. He looked away, and brushed them off of him, his eyes finding his phone once again.

A renewed sense of determination filled him. He had to reach his phone. He had to ask Bulma for help. He couldn't just lie here and let himself get sicker.

Goku reached out and grabbed his phone with trembling hands, pulling it close to him. He managed to unlock it, the small action feeling like it had drained him of the last of his energy.

But he pushed through the exhaustion and the pain, opening the contacts app on his phone with fumbling fingers. He quickly scrolled through the names until he found Bulma's, pressing the call button. He held the phone up to his ear and waited.

Ring, ring, ring...

Each ring of the phone felt like it dragged on forever. Goku waited, his impatience and desperation mounting with every passing second, his heart pounding against his aching ribs. *C'mon, pick up…*

The phone rang on, but there was no answer. Goku could feel his hope starting to dwindle with every unanswered ring.

In the end, the call went straight to voicemail, her cheerful voice instructing him to leave a message.

Goku groaned, frustration and irritation coursing through him. Why wasn't she answering? He tried calling her again, but got the same result. Straight to voicemail.

He ended the call, sighing heavily. It seemed as if going to see Bulma in person was the only option now.

He took a moment to steady himself, gathering what little energy he had left. Then he closed his eyes, focusing on Bulma's energy signature. It took him a moment due to his energy. Once he found it, he latched onto it and vanished from the room in a crackle of air.

A moment later, he appeared in the middle of Bulma's lab, the sudden teleportation making him sway slightly.

He looked around the room, eyeing the various machines and gadgets that filled the space.

"Bulma?" He called out, looking for signs of the blue-haired genius. "You here?"

There was a shuffle from a nearby corner, and Bulma emerged from behind a large machine, looking slightly flustered.

"Goku! What are you doing here?" She asked, clearly surprised by his sudden arrival. She tilted her head before raising an eyebrow. "And what are you sitting on the floor for…?"

Goku gave her a sheepish smile, scratching his head. "Hey, Bulma. Sorry for dropping in unannounced. I, uh, kinda need your help with something."

Bulma raised an eyebrow, looking him up and down. "Help with something?"

Goku fidgeted under her gaze, her analytical mind already working to deduce the reason for his visit.

He cleared his throat, feeling a bit self-conscious under her scrutiny. "Yeah, it's… well, it's kind of a weird situation, actually."

Bulma crossed her arms, leaning against her workbench. "Okay, now you got me intrigued. What kind of weird situation are we talking about here?"

Goku shifted his weight, unsure of how to explain his issue without sounding crazy. "Well, it's... I've been having these coughing fits lately. And they're getting worse. And, um..."

He trailed off, scratching the side of his head, trying to find the words to describe what he was experiencing.

Bulma's expression shifted from intrigued to concerned. "Coughing fits, huh? That doesn't sound good. Have you been to see a doctor about this?"

Goku grimaced, shaking his head. "Well, Chichi wanted me to go to a hospital, but I… I don't want to. I don't think they'd be able to help me, anyway."

Bulma pursed her lips, her eyes narrowing in thought. "What makes you think they wouldn't be able to help? They're medical professionals, they deal with all kinds of illnesses and conditions every day. They could run tests, give you medication, figure out what's causing the coughing."

Goku shrugged, feeling a pang of guilt for not being honest with her. "The thing is... I don't think it's a normal illness, Bulma. It's… It's different."

Bulma's curiosity was piqued even further. "Different how?"

Goku took a deep breath, bracing himself for her reaction. He knew he had to tell her the truth, or at least part of it.

"...Promise you won't think I'm crazy?"

Bulma chuckled slightly.

"When have I ever thought you're *not* crazy?" she teased, a smirk playing on her lips. "But seriously, I promise I won't think you're crazy. Now tell me what's going on. I'm all ears."

Goku swallowed, his heart pounding in his chest. "Well, when I cough, I… I spit up flowers. Purple ones."

Bulma's eyes widened in shock, her mouth falling open. "Hold on, you… spit up *flowers* ? Like actual, physical, *flowers* ?"

Goku nodded, his face flushing with embarrassment. "Yeah, I don't know how or why it's happening, but it is. It's been getting worse over the past few weeks, and I'm starting to get worried."

Bulma was silent for a moment, absorbing the information he had just given her.

"Huh, well, that's... definitely not something I've heard of before." She pushed herself off the workbench, coming closer to him. "And you said it's gotten worse over the past few weeks? How often do you cough up these flowers? Like how many at a time?"

Goku winced, feeling exposed under her intense gaze. "It started out with just a few petals, but now it's happening multiple times a day and it's entire flowers. It's like I'm a human vase or something."

Bulma's mind was whirling with the implications of what he was describing. "And you don't have any other symptoms? It's just the coughing?"

"Well, I am a bit nauseated and my chest has been hurting too. Oh, also my fingers are a little tingly, not to mention my throat is sore from all the coughing I've been doing, but that's about it." Goku admitted.

Bulma nodded thoughtfully, her mind already formulating theories. "Okay, and you have no idea how this started? No recent accidents, no contact with any strange plants or animals, nothing like that?"

Goku rubbed his chin, trying to recall the circumstances surrounding the first coughing fit. "Not that I'm aware of…? The chest pain has been going on for a while now. I thought it was just a muscle strain or something. But it's been getting worse, and that's when I started coughing up the flowers."

He left out the part about Vegeta, knowing it would only lead to more questions he wasn't ready to answer.

Bulma furrowed her brow in thought. "Huh, that's strange. The chest pain and the flowers are probably connected somehow. And the nausea and tingling in your fingers too. I'll have to run some tests to see what's going on."

Goku nodded, feeling relieved that Bulma was taking him seriously. "Yeah, I figured as much. Just don't get too invasive with them, okay?"

Bulma rolled her eyes, used to his lack of trust in medical procedures. "I'll try not to. We'll start with some blood work and an EKG."

"Whoa, wait a minute. Blood work?" Goku paled in response. He scooted back slightly, his eyes widening in fear. "You mean you have to stick me with *needles* ?!"

Bulma crossed her arms, her expression stern. "Yes, Goku. We have to take a sample of your blood to run tests. It's standard procedure. Oh, come on... Don't look so grim. It's just a small pinprick, you won't even feel it."

Bulma, noticing Goku's panicked expression, sighed. "Alright, look, I'll make a deal with you. You let me take a sample of your blood without running away, and I'll get you some of your favorite ramen afterwards."

Goku perked up at the mention of ramen. "You'll get me ramen if I let you take my blood?"

Bulma nodded. "Yep, I'll get you the biggest bowl of ramen you've ever seen if you hold still and let me take the blood sample."

At first it almost got him to listen, but then Goku's expression soured, the thought of food stirring a queasy feeling in his stomach. He knew that even his favorite ramen wouldn't taste right if he was coughing up flowers all the time.

Bulma noticed the change in his expression and frowned. "What's wrong? You love ramen, I thought that would motivate you."

Goku shook his head, a wave of nausea washing over him. "I...I don't think I can eat much of anything right now. I think this condition is messing with my appetite, All I could really handle was some Miso soup yesterday It hurts too much to swallow."

Bulma's expression softened, her scientific mind already suspecting what was wrong. "Really? Huh, that's interesting. It's possible that your body isn't processing food the way it should. And the chest pain, too, that might be a sign of something wrong with your digestive tract. Although it still doesn't explain why you'd be coughing up flowers."

Goku grimaced, rubbing his temples. "I don't get it, Bulma. Why is the coughing up flowers part happening at all? It's the weirdest thing I've ever experienced. And it feels like the pain and the coughing are getting worse every day."

Bulma sighed, her mind already going through all of the possible explanations, as she grabbed a syringe from her desk. "I wish I could give you an immediate answer, Goku. But I have to run some tests before I can say anything for sure. And that means I need a blood sample. So can you hold still for me, please?"

Goku's panic levels were rising as Bulma mentioned the needles again. He stepped back and began to hyperventilate, his chest constricting with fear. "No...no needles...please..."

Before Bulma could respond, Goku was suddenly wracked with another coughing fit. He doubled over, choking and gasping for air.

Bulma watched in concern as Goku struggled with the coughing, wincing as he retched up more purple flowers. She knew she needed to take a sample of his blood as soon as possible, but it seemed that Goku's anxiety was only making his condition worse.

"Goku, you need to calm down," Bulma tried to soothe him, kneeling down and placing a hand on his arm. "You're only making it worse by panicking. We have to do the blood work if we want to figure out what's going on."

Goku shook his head, still struggling to catch his breath. "No… I won't… those needles…"

Bulma took a deep breath, realizing that logical reasoning wasn't going to work on him in this state. She needed backup, someone strong enough to restrain him while she took the blood sample. And she knew just the person for the job.

She turned to one of her lab assistants, a nervous-looking man named Kyte. "Kyte, go find Vegeta and tell him to come down to the lab now. Tell him it's an emergency."

Kyte, who was well aware of Goku's dislike for all things medical, paled at the thought of calling Vegeta. But he nodded and hurried off to find him nonetheless.

Meanwhile, Bulma turned her attention back to Goku, who was still struggling to catch his breath. She rubbed his back reassuringly, trying to calm him down. "It's okay. Just take slow, deep breaths. Vegeta is on his way, so you have to try to relax until then."

But Goku wasn't listening, his mind consumed with his irrational fear of needles and his weakening body. He retched up more flowers, gasping for air between each cough.

Bulma's concern only grew as Goku's coughing fit persisted, his body shaking with the effort of each heave. He doubled over again, coughing up another handful of purple flowers.

She had never seen him like this before, so afraid and out of control.

Suddenly, the doors to the medical wing burst open, and Vegeta strode in, his expression dark with irritation.

He took in the sight of Goku hunched over, coughing and retching up flowers, and his irritation morphed into confusion and concern. "What the hell is going on here?"

Bulma turned to face him, her hands on her hips. "About damn time, Vegeta. I need your help with something."

Vegeta raised an eyebrow. "Help with *what* ? And what's wrong with Kakarot?"

Bulma sighed, gesturing towards Goku. "He's having some… medical issues. And he's refusing to let me take a simple blood sample. That's where you come in. I need you to restrain him while I take the sample."

Vegeta's expression darkened even further at her request. "You want me to hold him down like some kind of wild animal? Why don't you do it yourself? You're the one who needs the sample."

Bulma rolled her eyes, knowing that he wasn't going to make this easy. "You know damn well why I'm asking you. You're the only one who can hold him down long enough for me to draw the blood. Just do it, and I'll explain everything later."

Vegeta gritted his teeth, knowing that she was right. He approached Goku, who was still coughing and retching. "Ugh, fine. Kakarot, calm down. It's just a little blood, you're being ridiculous."

Goku looked up at him, his eyes wide with fear. "I-I can't... needles… no needles…"

Vegeta's irritation spiked at Goku's childish behavior.

"...Stop being a baby. You've faced much more powerful opponents than some damn needle, so what are you so afraid of?" He grabbed Goku's arms, trying to hold him still. When he found himself socked in the nose, his irritation spiked.

Goku was frantic, a new coughing fit wracking his body. He thrashed against Vegeta's grip, his body weak but his panic making him strong. "I said no needles, let go!"

Vegeta grunted in frustration, struggling to keep Goku still. "Dammit, you idiot, stop flailing around! It's just going to hurt more if you don't hold still already! Just let Bulma take the sample already, so we can get this over with."

He used more of his strength to pin Goku down, holding him still despite his struggles and coughs.

Bulma approached them, syringe in hand. She knew she had to act fast before Goku's panic made the situation worse.

"Okay, Vegeta, hold him down tightly. I have to take the sample quickly."

Vegeta nodded, his grip on Goku's arms tightening. Goku's coughing fit was starting to subside, but he was still in a panic. "Hurry up, woman. He's already a mess and it's pissing me off."

Bulma positioned the needle at the crook of Goku's elbow, her movements steady and efficient. "Just stay still, Goku. It's going to be just a little prick."

She inserted the needle, quickly filling the vial with the blood she needed. Goku cried out in pain and tried to pull away, but Vegeta's grip on him was unyielding.

Once she had taken enough blood to run the tests, Bulma withdrew the needle and placed a cotton swab underneath a bandage over the tiny puncture wound. She then put the vial of blood aside and looked at Vegeta, sighing. "Alright. You can let him go now."

"Finally…" Vegeta huffed and released Goku, standing back and watching as the other saiyan slowly caught his breath. He crossed his arms, his irritation now directed towards Bulma. "Now can you please explain to me what's going on, already? Why was he coughing up flowers?"

Bulma nodded, holding up the vial of blood. "I'll have to run some tests on this first, but I can tell you that Goku's condition is definitely not normal. He has some kind of internal issue that's causing his body to malfunction."

Vegeta's eyes widened in surprise. "His body is malfunctioning? What does *that* mean?"

Bulma shrugged, still looking at the blood. "I'm not sure yet. But I suspect it has something to do with his stomach or digestive system. If you can, I want you to bring him back to the infirmary for me. I need to keep an eye on him and run more tests as soon as possible to figure out what's causing this. Can you do that for me?"

Vegeta scowled at the thought of having to babysit a sick and panicky Goku, but he reluctantly nodded. "...Fine. But you better get to the bottom of this quickly. I have better things to do than play nurse to him."

After all the time Vegeta had spent avoiding him, hearing the comment stung, but Goku chose not to say anything.

Bulma smiled weakly, knowing that he wasn't happy about the situation. "Great, sure. I'll be down there in a bit after I check out this blood sample."

Vegeta grunted in response, moving to help Goku to his feet. "Come on, Kakarot. Let's get you checked out. And try not to be a pain in the ass, for once."

As Vegeta steadied him, the ache in Goku's chest lessened to almost nothing. The moment Vegeta's fingers closed around his arm, the pain faded away as if he was being healed. He leaned heavily into Vegeta, his legs weak and shaking.

Vegeta grumbled, feeling the familiar weight of Goku against him. "Can you walk on your own or do I have to carry you?"

Goku shook his head, his grip on Vegeta's arm tightening. "I… I can't… my legs feel weird...."

"Oh, for fuck's sake…" Vegeta rolled his eyes, realizing that Goku was truly in no condition to walk. "Here…"

With a small blush, he wrapped a strong arm around Goku's back and another beneath his knees, easily hoisting him up into a bridal carry.He muttered under his breath.

Goku yelped in surprise as he was suddenly picked up off the ground, instinctually putting his arms around Vegeta's neck to keep from falling. He blinked, feeling the pain in his chest become replaced by a warm, almost fuzzy feeling.

Despite his initial grumbling, Vegeta found himself surprisingly unbothered by the weight of Goku. It was familiar, in a way, and he realized that this was the most intimate he'd been with the other Saiyan in a long time.

"You weigh as much as a damn elephant," he grumbled as they started towards the infirmary.

Goku didn't reply, too dazed and worn out to form a proper response. He nestled his face against Vegeta's chest, feeling oddly comforted by the steady thrumming of the other Saiyan's heartbeat.

Vegeta arched an eyebrow at Goku's uncharacteristic silence but said nothing. He continued to carry Goku in his arms, the feeling of the other Saiyan's body pressed against his own stirring a strange sensation in his chest.

Vegeta carried Goku into the infirmary, carefully laying him down on one of the medical beds. He watched as Goku sank back against the pillows, his eyes half-lidded and his body trembling with exhaustion.

Goku couldn't help but feel a tinge of disappointment when Vegeta let go of him, the familiar pain creeping back into his chest, but he wouldn't say it out loud.

Vegeta stood by the bed, looking down at Goku with a mixture of irritation and something else entirely. He tried to ignore the concern he felt at seeing the other Saiyan in such a weakened state.

"Stay here, and don't do anything stupid," he ordered gruffly. "Bulma's going to be back here soon to run more tests on you."

Vegeta turned to walk away, but, as he started to leave, he heard Goku's voice, weak and panicked. "Wait, don't go..."

After weeks of barely hearing anything from him, and *months* of Vegeta continuously avoiding him, Goku couldn't let him leave *now* . He needed to talk to him. Vegeta's presence was like a life line, the only thing that had offered him any kind of relief from whatever this was.

He paused, looking back at Goku, who was struggling to sit up on the bed. Another coughing fit wracked his body, more purple flower petals spilling forth onto the sheets.

Vegeta's irritation flared at the sight of those damn flowers. He didn't know what they were or why Goku was coughing them up, but seeing the other Saiyan in this much distress didn't sit well with him.

He grumbled under his breath and returned to Goku's bedside, urging him to lay back down. "Alright, I'm not going anywhere. Just stop coughing already, it's annoying."

Goku gasped and wheezed, the coughing fit subsiding as Vegeta spoke. He was too exhausted to resist, letting the prince push him back down onto the bed. He looked up at him, his eyes watery and pleading. "Don't leave me, please…"

Vegeta grunted, crossing his arms. Seeing Goku's pleading expression was messing with his irritation, making his chest feel tight in a way he didn't like. "I just told you I'm not going anywhere, didn't I? What, you want me to hold your hand or something?"

Goku nodded weakly, reaching out blindly with one trembling hand. "Yeah. If you would..."

"...Wait, you're *serious* , aren't you…?" Vegeta was taken aback by Goku's plea, his usual reaction would be to smack his hand away and tell him to grow up . But something about the vulnerability in Goku's eyes made him hesitate. "Damn it…"

He reluctantly took Goku's outstretched hand, enclosing it in his own. "Fine, you big baby…. Happy now?"

Goku closed his eyes, letting out a sigh of relief as he felt Vegeta's fingers intertwine with his. He squeezed Vegeta's hand weakly, a small smile forming on his face. The pain in his chest had lessened once more, eased by Vegeta's touch. He relaxed against the pillows, looking up at him with a grateful expression.

"Yeah...thanks." He whispered, his voice hoarse from coughing.

"Don't mention it." Vegeta scowled. "As I said before, Bulma will probably be here soon to run her stupid tests, so just rest for now."

Goku nodded weakly, his grip on Vegeta's hand loosening slightly as he closed his eyes, taking slow, measured breaths as he tried to will himself to relax. Down deep, he wanted so badly to say something more, to ask him why he'd been avoiding him; Confront him about his feelings, but, just like so many times before that, no words would come out. Instead, all he could do was focus on the feeling of Vegeta's hand in his own, a silent anchor keeping him grounded.

Vegeta watched as Goku's breathing becoming slower and more even as he began to drift off. He knew that he should pull his hand away, but in the end he was unable to bring himself to do so.

He stood there silently, his hand still clutching Goku's as his mind swirled with a maelstrom of emotions he didn't understand. He was used to seeing Goku as his rival, his equal in battle and strength. How was he *supposed* to process this?

Taking a seat at his bedside, he found himself letting out a breath he didn't know he was holding in.

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END CHAPTER 4

Chapter 5

Story: A Heart's Bloom, Chapter 5

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Vegeta found himself jolted from his thoughts by the sound of footsteps approaching. Looking up, he saw Bulma walking towards them, a notebook in her hand.

"How's he doing?" She asked as she approached. She cast a worried glance at Goku's exhausted form, taking in the sight of him with a mix of concern and confusion.

Vegeta grunted, not releasing his grip on Goku's hand.

"He's settled down," he admitted. "But he started coughing up those damn flowers again earlier."

Bulma noted Vegeta's refusal to let go of Goku's hand, but didn't comment on it. She pulled up a chair beside the bed and sat down, opening her notebook to a fresh page.

"I've been able to run some basic tests on the blood sample I took, and there's definitely an abnormality. His cells are responding strangely to something, but I can't pinpoint exactly what it is yet."

Vegeta's irritation flared. "What do you mean you don't know what it is? You're supposed to be the genius here. Can't you do something useful?"

Bulma shot Vegeta a glare, her irritation matching his. "This isn't one of my machines or gadgets, Vegeta. This is an internal issue, I can't just wave a wand and fix it instantly. It's going to take some time to figure out what's going on."

Vegeta huffed, but didn't argue further. He looked down at Goku, noticing that the other Saiyan had woken up faintly at their conversation, his eyes fluttering open, but he quickly fell back to sleep.

"Just figure it out quickly… I… I don't like seeing him like this." Vegeta said, his voice quieter than usual, betraying a hint of vulnerability.

"I'll work as fast as I can," Bulma assured him. "In the meantime, you'll just have to keep an eye on him and let me know if his condition gets worse."

Bulma closed her notebook and set it aside, turning her attention to Goku. "I'm going to need to run a few more tests now. Just basic stuff: EKG, blood pressure, those kinds of things. He shouldn't need to move much for these."

Vegeta grunted in agreement, reluctantly releasing Goku's hand as Bulma began her work. He stood back, watching as she took Goku's vitals and attached pads to his chest for the EKG.

Goku awoke again from the movement, his eyes half-lidded and disoriented. He looked around, confusion spreading across his face as he saw Bulma attaching the pads to his chest. "What's going on...?"

Bulma gave him a reassuring smile as she finished attaching the pads. "I'm just doing some tests on you, it's nothing to worry about. Just try to stay still for me, okay?"

Goku nodded weakly, his movements slow and labored. He glanced at Vegeta, who was standing a few feet away, arms crossed over his chest.

Once she was done, Bulma turned on the machine and the rhythm of Goku's heartbeat was soon echoing through the room, filling the tense silence.

Vegeta watched the monitor, his eyes fixed on the pattern of peaks and valleys. He didn't understand what the numbers truly meant, but he can sense that Bulma is looking for something in specific.

Bulma studied the EKG readout, her brow furrowing slightly. The rhythm of Goku's heart rate had a few skips and beats that were slightly off, almost too subtle for someone without medical training to notice.

"Hmm...there are some minor anomalies in his heart rate..." she muttered, making a few notes in her notebook.

"What kind of anomalies?" Vegeta asked, his tone brusque but betraying a hint of worry behind it.

Bulma continued to study the readout, her eyes scanning the lines. "It's the rhythm. It's nothing life-threatening, but it isn't as steady as it should be."

Vegeta scowled, his irritation growing. "So there's something wrong with his heart as well? What the hell is happening to him? You don't think this could somehow be connected to the heart virus he had all those years ago, do you?"

Bulma shook her head, still studying the readout.

"No, I don't think so. Whatever is causing this, it's new. I think we need to look a little deeper into this," she said, unplugging the pads from Goku's chest. "Goku, I'm going to need to move you to the exam room for a CT scan. Can you stand up?"

Goku nodded weakly, his eyes still half-lidded with exhaustion. He tried to sit up on the bed, but his limbs felt heavy and sluggish. He attempted to lift himself up, but his arms trembled, and he slumped back onto the pillows. His arms were tingling even worse than before, as if the circulation was being cut off.

Vegeta's irritation flared again at the sight, his jaw clenching.

"Do I have to do *everything* for you?" he grumbled, stepping forward.

Without waiting for a response, he scooped Goku up in his arms once more, lifting him off the bed bridal style. Goku gasped softly as he was lifted, his body instinctively leaning into Vegeta's, seeking comfort and support.

Vegeta gritted his teeth, ignoring the warm feeling that spread through his chest at the touch. He walked out of the room and towards another section of the infirmary.

Bulma followed after them, her notebook clutched in her hand. She silently observed as Vegeta carried Goku past the control room into the exam room, noting the way Goku leaned into him, almost as if seeking comfort.

"Some of the pain goes away whenever you hold me like this." Goku murmured, nuzzling up against his chest.

Vegeta stiffened slightly at the comment, his heart rate giving a strange flutter.

"...Idiot, now's not the time to be clingy," he grumbled, his voice lacking its usual bite.

But he didn't make any attempt to push Goku away or let go of him as he continued to walk. The feeling of the other Saiyan in his arms was both familiar and foreign, stirring a strange mixture of annoyance and protectiveness within him.

Bulma ushered them into the exam room and gave Goku a quick rundown of what would happen, including the need for him to remain completely still for the thirty minute duration and the eventual IV contrast.

"Alright, Goku, we're going to do two separate scans, the first one without contrast and the second one with it. I need you to lay completely still now while I run the scan, or it could mess up the images and we'll have to take them again." Bulma guided Goku to lie back on the table, making sure his body was properly situated, before pulling out a small box of ear plugs and placing them into his ears. "Here. The machine can get very loud, so these will help block out some of the noise."

Goku winced slightly as the earplugs filled his ears, isolating the sounds from around him. He laid back on the bed, his body a bit stiff and tense. The idea of remaining completely still while the loud machine scanned him wasn't appealing, but he understood the necessity.

Bulma turned towards Vegeta, her face serious. "You'll have to wait outside with me during the scan. The risk of radiation exposure is too dangerous for you to stay here with him."

Vegeta's eyes narrowed, a brief flicker of irritation passing over his face. "I can handle a little radiation just fine. It's not a big deal."

Bulma crossed her arms, meeting Vegeta's gaze head-on. "It's not up for discussion, Vegeta. You can watch from the control room."

Vegeta's jaw clenched, his stubborn streak rearing up. He almost wanted to argue, but he knew better than to challenge Bulma's authority, especially in matters relating to technology and safety.

"Fine." He grunted, his tone sulky and annoyed.

Goku, sensing the tension in the air, opened his eyes a little. He could tell they were talking about him, and the look on Vegeta's face told him enough. Fear and anxiety filled him once again.

"Wait...Vegeta, you're leaving?" he asked weakly, his voice filled with a note of desperation.

Vegeta's eyes widened fractionally at the distressed tone in Goku's voice. He looked down at the other Saiyan, seeing the fear in his eyes, and his throat suddenly felt tight.

"I..." he began, but Bulma interrupted him.

"It's alright, Goku," Bulma reassured him, trying to keep her tone lighthearted. "It's just a safety precaution. We'll be in the control room, watching everything. You're going to be perfectly fine."

Vegeta watched Bulma, his jaw clenching as he saw that Goku's anxiety was spiking at the thought of being separated from him. Despite his better judgment, a part of him almost wanted to say he'd stay, to hell with the radiation risk, but he knew it would only cause more arguments.

"Here, hold onto this, if you need anything, I want you to press that button so I can stop the machine." Bulma handed Goku a small device with a button attached to it. He took it, but didn't say anything. "I'll be back in fifteen minutes to give you the contrast."

And as soon as Goku saw them leave the room, the feeling in his throat began to intensify once more. He tried to swallow, but the itching and tickling didn't subside. As he lay still on the bed, the urge to cough became stronger, the petals in his throat felt as if they were clawing at his insides.

The table began to roar, moving up inside of the donut shape section and making strange noises Goku had never heard before. The earplugs blocked out most of the sounds, but the silence only served to heighten the discomfort. He closed his eyes, focusing on his breathing.

The first five minutes passed slowly. Goku kept his breath as steady as possible, fighting back the overwhelming urge to cough. His eyes remained closed, his mind focused on not making a sound, not disrupting the scan.

But the tickling in his throat was almost unbearable. He could feel the petals rubbing against his windpipe, sending jolts of discomfort up his throat.

Sweat beads formed on his forehead, the effort of keeping still and silent taking its toll. The tickling had progressed into a burning sensation, and he could taste blood at the back of his throat. Each breath felt like a struggle, each second like an eternity.

The next five minutes were pure torture. Goku silently pleaded for the scan to finish soon, for the pain and itchiness to end. His hands were clenching the sides of the table, his knuckles white from the force of his grip. Each beat of his heart echoed in his ears, the sound deafening.

Finally, after what felt like forever, the last five minutes passed. Goku heard a beep and the loud noises of the machine ceased. When the table rolled back out from inside the donut, he almost immediately, he started coughing, the force of it sending sharp stabs of pain through his chest.

He felt blood in his mouth, the metallic taste acrid and bitter. The petals that had tormented him moments ago now lay discarded around him, a testament to his struggle to remain silent.

The door opened, and Bulma rushed in, followed closely by Vegeta. A look of concern crossed Vegeta's face as he saw Goku struggling and coughing, the exam table littered with bloody flower petals.

Bulma immediately went to Goku's side, rubbing his back gently. "It's alright, get it all out."

Vegeta stood by her side, his eyes fixed on Goku's face. The sight of the other Saiyan in such distress was more unnerving than he cared to admit, each cough making his chest tighten. He almost wanted to say something, *anything* to let Goku know that he was worried, but his voice seemed to fail him.

At long last, the coughing subsided. Goku's breaths were shallow and labored, his body trembling with exhaustion.

"Listen, I'm going to have to get one more scan, this time with contrast. I need you to stay still for me while I administer it, okay?" As Bulma began to prepare the IV, Goku's face paled slightly, his eyes darting to the needle in Bulma's hand, the mere sight of the sharp metal tip sending a chill down his spine.

He remembered the sharp pain of the needle from the blood test earlier and the idea of being pricked again sent a shiver down his spine.

"Wait, wait," He said, his voice filled with unease. "You mean I have to get another shot?"

Bulma paused, recognizing the look on his face. "Well, yes, Goku. Unfortunately, the contrast dye has to be injected through an IV for the CT scan. It'll make it so I can see your internal organs more clearly."

Goku looked distressed, his eyes darting back to the needle and then to Bulma. He swallowed hard, his throat dry. "But...the needle… it hurts..."

Bulma softened her tone, trying to reassure him. "I know needles can be a little scary, but the pain is only temporary. We need to make sure we can see everything properly to find out what's wrong with you."

"Still-" Goku continued to stare at the needle, his breathing becoming slightly shallower. He felt trapped, cornered by his own fear and the necessity of the scan.

Vegeta was watching Goku carefully. He wasn't used to seeing the other Saiyan so unsettled, especially by something as seemingly minor as a needle. He stepped forward, placing a hand on Goku's shoulder, his voice gruff, but surprisingly gentle.

"Forget the stupid needle…" he commanded.

Goku's eyes flicked towards Vegeta, his expression still betraying his unease. His heart was pounding in his chest, the fear of the needle clawing at his senses. But there was a strange

comfort in Vegeta's steady gaze and the firmness of his grip on his shoulder.

"Don't even *look* at it. Just focus on me." Vegeta's voice remained gruff, but there was a hint of reassurance in it, a subtle attempt to distract Goku.

Goku took a shaky breath. He could still sense the cold, metallic instrument being prepared beside him, but he tried as best as he could to ignore it.

Goku's eyes locked onto Vegeta's face. He felt a strange sense of security in Vegeta's tone, the steady gaze pulling his attention away from the needle. His breathing began to slow slightly, the fear not entirely gone, but somewhat eased.

Bulma watched the interaction with a hint of surprise. She had never seen Vegeta act so gentle towards Goku before, even if his tone was still brusque and aloof. She continued preparing the IV, silently thankful that the other Saiyan was able to somewhat ease Goku's anxiety.

Once the IV was ready, Bulma moved closer to Goku. "Okay, I'm going to insert the needle now. Just keep looking at Vegeta, alright?"

Goku's throat went dry, fear and tension coiling within him. He nodded weakly, his gaze locked onto Vegeta's face.

Bulma gently disinfected the area where she would insert the needle, her touch firm but gentle. She could sense Goku's anxiety, his eyes still locked on Vegeta's face.

"Just hold still, this will only take a moment," she reassured him.

Goku nodded again, his eyes never leaving Vegeta's face. He whimpered as the needle pierced his skin, his hand clenching into a fist. Despite his best efforts to stay still, he couldn't help the loud whimper that escaped his lips, tears welling up in his eyes.

Vegeta's jaw clenched, his grip on Goku's shoulder tightening marginally. He could see the pain on Goku's face, the vulnerability etched in every line, and it stirred a strange feeling in his chest. He wanted to look away, to feign indifference, but he couldn't seem to tear his gaze away from Goku's pleading eyes.

Bulma finished the IV quickly, securing the needle in place.

"Alright, that's it. You did good," she said softly, trying to soothe his obvious distress.

Goku's chest was still heaving as he tried to control his labored breathing. The tears still clung to his eyelashes, their wetness catching the harsh fluorescent light. His eyes were still locked on Vegeta, seeking comfort and reassurance.

"I'm going to give you the IV contrast now." Bulma said. "You might feel some heat and a sensation that you have to use the bathroom. But don't worry, it's completely normal and harmless."

Goku's eyes widened slightly at the description, his unease growing. He swallowed hard, his eyes darting between Bulma and Vegeta. "It... It won't hurt, will it?" he asked timidly.

Bulma shook her head, trying to reassure him. "No, it won't hurt. It's just a strange sensation, and it'll only last for a minute. I promise, it's completely safe."

Goku drew in a shaky breath. He glanced at Vegeta whose gaze was still firmly planted on him, a reassuring presence. Drawing courage from the other Saiyan's unwavering gaze, he nodded slowly and closed his eyes.

"Okay...I'm ready." he said, his voice barely above a whisper.

Bulma pressed the plunger on the syringe, slowly injecting the IV contrast. For a few moments, nothing unusual happened. But then, Goku felt a warm sensation spread throughout him, just as Bulma had described. It wasn't painful, just… weird. He shifted slightly, the feeling of having to pee almost overwhelming.

Vegeta found himself gripping Goku's shoulder tighter, offering silent reassurance. "You're doing fine."

Goku's eyes were squeezed shut, his breath coming in shallow puffs. The warmth coursing through his veins was foreign and uncomfortable, and the urge to use the bathroom was more intense now. He couldn't help the small whimper that escaped his lips, his body tensing further as his face became slightly flushed.

"It's okay. Just a few more seconds, and it'll be over," Bulma said softly, her voice soothing. She could see the distress on Goku's face, knowing that the reaction to the IV contrast wasn't pleasant, but completely normal.

Goku nodded weakly, his eyes still firmly shut. He was holding his breath, the sensation of warmth and feeling like he was going to pee himself overpowering. He focused on the feeling of Vegeta's hand gripping his shoulder, using it as an anchor to ground himself through the discomfort.

As the final moments ticked by, the sensation slowly faded. Goku felt a strange emptiness as the warmth receded, and the urgent need to use the bathroom lessened. His eyes slowly fluttered open, his breathing a little unsteady.

"Feeling better?" Bulma asked, as Goku's breathing was evening out.

The strange and uncomfortable sensations were fading, and he was starting to feel somewhat normal again. After giving a small nod, Goku turned his head to look at Vegeta, their eyes meeting for a moment, an unspoken understanding passing between them.

"Now, this next scan shouldn't take as long as the first one did. I'll give it about ten minutes. Do you think you can handle it?"

Goku swallowed hard, the taste of blood still lingering in his mouth. He closed his eyes for a moment, steadying his breathing. The mere thought of enduring another scan was daunting, but he knew he didn't have a choice. He didn't trust his voice to speak, so he just nodded weakly in agreement.

"Just lay back for me. Try to stay as still as possible, we'll be right outside, okay?" Bulma gently pressed Goku back onto the bed, avoiding the bloody flowers.

He trembled as she positioned him for the scan, taking a deep breath to steady himself. Despite the temptation to protest, he bit his lip and tried to remain calm, knowing it would be counterproductive.

Vegeta lingered by the door, his gaze fixed on Goku's face. The sight of the other Saiyan's vulnerability tugged at him once more, a nagging voice urging him to stay. But heeding Bulma's authority, he followed her into the control room, the sound of the door closing echoing in his ears.

Back inside the room, Goku was left with overwhelming silence once again broken by the distant sounds of the machine roaring. The ear plugs blocked out some of the noise, but they couldn't drown out the fear and uncertainty that now engulfed him.

The itch in his throat once again returned, the petals scratching against his windpipe. Goku fought against the urge to cough again, his whole body tense and rigid as he tried to stay perfectly still, the solitude amplifying the anxious thoughts swirling in his mind.

It took all his willpower to keep his breathing steady, to swallow down the rising urge to cough. He closed his eyes, focusing on his breathing, begging the minutes to pass by quicker.

He longed in that moment for Vegeta's touch, the reassurance of his voice. But he was alone, with nothing but the pain in his chest.

Finally, after what felt like forever, the machine beeped once more, the table moving back in place once more and signaling the end of the second scan. Goku let out a shaky breath of relief, the tension easing from his body slightly. He sat up slowly, spitting out a few more bloodied flower petals on the bed.

The door opened a moment later, Bulma quickly entering the room, followed closely by Vegeta. Her expression was filled with concern as she saw Goku sitting up, spitting out the petals. She immediately went to his side, reaching out to touch him, but hesitating.

"Alright, you're all done now. How are you feeling?" she asked, her voice quiet. Her eyes scanned over Goku's face, noting the traces of blood at the corners of his mouth and the paleness of his skin.

"I'm...fine," Goku whispered, his voice raspy and strained. "Just tired."

Bulma placed a gentle hand on his shoulder, her fingers tracing a soothing pattern on his skin. She glanced over to Vegeta, her eyes flickering for a moment. She knew he was tense, his usual stoicism masking whatever he was really feeling.

"I'm going to have to keep him at capsule corp for a while, to monitor his condition." she explained, her voice soft. "It may be a bit before I have the results from his CT scan back and am able to tell you what this is, though. Do you think you could bring him back to one of the guest rooms?"

Vegeta's jaw tightened, his eyes narrowing at Bulma's request. In any other circumstance, he'd protest, argue that he had more important things to do than continuing to play nursemaid. But the sight of Goku, pale and exhausted, stirred something deep within him.

He gave a terse nod, uncrossing his arms. "Yeah, whatever."

He stepped forward, approaching the bed where Goku sat and, without a word, he reached down and gently scooped Goku up into his arms, just like before, careful not to jostle him too much.

Goku felt a wave of surprise wash over him as he found himself once again lifted into Vegeta's strong arms. But he was too tired to protest, too weak to struggle, and, truth be told, he didn't *want* to. He just let himself be carried, his head resting against Vegeta's broad chest.

It was relaxing, as if the pain in his chest was lifted, all thanks to Vegeta's touch.

Even as he carried Goku to the guest room, a million thoughts spun in Vegeta's head. The way he leaned into him, the way his breaths were coming out slightly ragged. The memory of the flowers, bloodied in Goku's mouth, was seared into his mind.

This is wrong.

Goku was the one of the strongest people he knew, the one who always bounced back, no matter how hard he was hit. Seeing him this weak like this didn't settle well with him.

Once he reached the guest room, he gently laid Goku down onto the bed. His arms felt oddly empty as he pulled away and watched Goku's body sink into the mattress, a sigh escaping his lips.

A moment of silence passed as Vegeta stood there. His eyes flickered over the other Saiyan's form, the paleness of his skin, the slight tremors in his limbs. He wanted to say something, to *do* something, but the words got stuck in his throat. What was he supposed to say? What was he supposed to do?

What the hell *could* he do?

He was about to leave, about to let his pride get the best of him and return to his own room, when Goku's voice stopped him short. It was a quiet whisper, brittle and weak, but it echoed in the silence of the room.

"Wait, don't go…," Goku looked at Vegeta with half-open eyes, pleading, "Stay with me... please..."

Just like before.

Vegeta froze, his heart racing at Goku's plea. He yearned to respond with his usual indifference, but this time the words wouldn't come.

He sighed heavily and sat down on the bed, the mattress sagging under his weight. He was just inches away from Goku now. The room was quiet, except for their breathing, leaving Vegeta with too many thoughts in his head to count.

*Why does Kakarot even **want** me here?*

He had treated him like garbage and had been avoiding him for *months* , if he didn't count the rare times he managed to push aside his pride to go spar with him. He could only guess how much his last text message had hurt him considering that the other Saiyan had never responded to it, despite being quick to respond to any others.

But it appeared that trying to push Goku away had only made him want to be around him more.

And he didn't understand why.

Why does he think so highly of me after everything I've done to him?

He was far too kind to people.

Too forgiving, even when the person didn't deserve it.

But that was who Goku was. He had *always* been that way, and despite how much Vegeta had told himself he hated him for it, it was something that had ultimately ended up drawing him *towards* him instead.

He knew he should apologize and tell him he was sorry. But what right did he have to expect forgiveness? If Goku hadn't stumbled into Bulma's lab as sick as a dog, Vegeta wouldn't be here with him right now. He would still be avoiding him.

Why? Because Vegeta was a coward.

A coward who didn't know how to handle people.

He didn't *do* feelings. It scared him. So he ran away from it.

And as a result, he had pushed away one of the only people who ever dared care about him.

But at the end of the day, that was who *Vegeta* was. Cold and ruthless. He was a *warrior* at heart, not some nurturer or a person who comforted others.

And yet, despite himself, some part of him wanted to reassure Goku and take away his pain. To reach out and touch him, even if it was only for a moment.

The tension between his desires and his inability to act on them was enough to drive him mad. The silence in the room was thick, and Vegeta kept his eyes fixed on the wall, his jaw clenched, his heart thumping loudly in his ears.

Goku shifted slightly, and Vegeta noticed out of the corner of his eye that the other Saiyan's arm was moving, as if weakly reaching out to him.

Then, Goku's fingers brushed against Vegeta's hand, the touch gentle and soft. The contact sent a jolt through Vegeta, his heart skipping a beat.

He looked down at their linked hands, then up at Goku's face. The other Saiyan's eyes were now open, peering up at him with need.

Vegeta tensed, conflicted between his desire to pull away and the strong urge to once again hold Goku's hand.

This wasn't how they communicated.

Unable to endure the intensity of the moment, Vegeta once again looked away, his eyes fixed on the wall in front of him.

The feeling of Goku's hand on his was overwhelming, stirring emotions he wasn't sure he was prepared to handle. Vegeta could feel the heat of Goku's body, the gentle pressure of his fingers around his own.

It was just like before, but it felt different somehow.

They sat like that for a long time, until finally, after what felt like forever, Bulma arrived.

"Alright. I've got the results of the CT scans."

…

END CHAPTER 5

Chapter 6

Story: A Heart's Bloom, Chapter 6

Sorry, y'all, this may end up having a few more chapters than I initially thought. I basically have the entire story written, but I want to keep chapters short.

Also, once again, thank you for all the kudos, comments and support, I hope everybody will stick with me to the end. 🥹

...

Bulma's arrival broke the strange, almost trancelike state Vegeta was in. He quickly disentangled his hand from Goku's, and stood up to lean against the wall, the absence of the touch making him feel strangely cold.

He turned to look at Bulma, his expression stoic once again, hiding the jumble of emotions that were swirling within him.

"Alright. I've got the results of Goku's CT scans." She said, holding up a tablet in her hand. Her eyes scanned over the results on the tablet, her face taking on a more serious expression. She let out a sigh, her fingers tapping against the screen.

"And? What does it say?" Vegeta spoke up, masking his anxiety with a blunt, demanding tone.

"Well, from what I can tell, there appears to be some kind of abnormal growth in his lungs, which is pretty consistent with the symptoms he's been experiencing..." Bulma explained, sounding professional but worried simultaneously.

"Abnormal growth…?" Vegeta's heart pounded in his chest. "Like a tumor or something?"

"Well, not quite," Bulma replied. "It doesn't fit the usual parameters of a tumor, and it's positioned in a peculiar location, along his right pulmonary bronchus... It's unlike anything I've ever seen before. But considering that he's been coughing up flowers, my guess is it's some kind plant matter."

"Plant matter…? Hold on, you're saying Kakarot has *plants growing inside him* ?" Vegeta's voice was laced with a hint of disbelief but also nausea. The thought that there were actual flowers growing inside Goku's lungs… It was both revolting and terrifying.

"I know it sounds crazy, but it's the best working theory based on the information I have so far." Bulma replied matter-of-factly, her voice almost monotone as she discussed the medical jargon. "The growth I observed in the scan has all the characteristics of flowering plants, down to the root system that's starting to spread down into his airways. And since it seems to get worse when he's upset about something, it's possible his energy is affecting its growth rate somehow."

"So… what are you saying?" Vegeta gritted out the words, still trying to wrap his head around the situation. "That this-this *thing* will continue to grow until it... *what* ? Takes over his entire body or something?"

Bulma shook her head, a frown creasing her brow. "I can't say for sure what will happen if the growths remain unchecked, but based on their current state, it's clear they pose a significant risk. Their roots are already growing along his airways, increasing the chances of airway obstruction, which can lead to serious respiratory issues. And the root system appears to be quite complex, so the longer this goes on, the more damage it could end up doing to him..."

"Then… Why not just get rid of them? You're a scientist, aren't you? Figure something out." Vegeta said, his voice betraying a hint of desperation.

"I'm a *scientist* , Vegeta, not a magician." Bulma glared at him slightly. "And while I could have a procedure performed to remove it surgically, it's not that simple. The growths are too intertwined with his pulmonary bronchus, so it can't be removed without potentially damaging his lung. And there's also the matter of its origin. We still don't know where these

plants came from or how they're receiving the necessary resources to grow. So… Given the complexity of the situation and the risk factor involved, the most effective course of action would be to remove the affected lung entirely."

"Remove his lung?" For a moment, Vegeta felt as though the floor had dropped out from under him. "You can't be serious!"

Anger boiled inside him, mixed with fear and anguish. All these years they had known each other, all the battles they had fought, the hardships they had undergone... To think that it might all lead up to this.

"It's the cleanest solution, and honestly, there's a high chance it would be successful." Bulma pressed, sensing that Vegeta needed to hear the practical side of things to quell his emotional response. "The other lung should be able to handle the air exchange on its own. With the right medical care and time, he could still live a full life with just one lung."

"But he'll never be able to *fight* again." The words were bitter on his tongue. They both knew how significant this was. Goku lived for fighting. It was an integral part of his life, of who he was. To take that away from him... It was akin to taking away his very essence.

"I know..." Bulma's voice was quiet, carrying the weight of the implications. "But considering the alternative, it's the best option we've got. Goku's health and well-being have to be the first priority. We can't afford to risk his life for the sake of his pride as a fighter."

Vegeta seethed, his hands clenched into fists. It didn't seem right, to have to make such a sacrifice, both physically and emotionally, for the sake of health.

But deep down, he knew Bulma was right. He'd be damned if he let Goku's life be in danger only because he didn't want him to lose an organ.

Seeing Goku in this state broke something deep within him. The sight of one of the strongest warriors he had ever known reduced to such fragility was *harrowing* .

Usually, he was full of energy, laughing and smiling, standing tall no matter what. He was like the sun, always so bright and constant, the one person who never failed to bring out both the best and the worst in Vegeta.

Despite their rivalry and all the time they had spent fighting and arguing, he had never wanted this for him.

"When would this procedure take place?" He finally asked, his voice barely above a whisper.

"As soon as possible," Bulma replied, her own expression solemn. "I'll make sure everything is prepared for the surgery and we should be able to begin within a few hours. I'll just have to hire a surgeon first."

"Wait. Aren't you going to ask me what *I* think about all this?" Goku, who had been listening silently from his bed, suddenly spoke up, his voice weak but firm.

Both Vegeta and Bulma turned to look at him, surprised to hear him speak up. They had been so focused on the discussion that they had almost forgotten he was an active participant in his own medical fate.

"You know I can still hear you, right?" Goku continued, lifting one hand to cover his mouth as a fit of coughs started to wrack his body. "As the one who's to be on the operating table, I think I should have a say in all of this."

Bulma and Vegeta exchanged a glance, both a little taken aback by Goku's assertion. It was true, they hadn't asked for his input, instead discussing his medical situation as though he wasn't there. But now that he was voicing his opinion, they both fell silent, allowing him to speak.

"I get it, I'm sick," Goku said when the coughing subsided, his voice a little croaky from the effort. "And I know you're trying to help me. But cutting out a whole lung? That's kinda extreme, don't ya think?"

"Goku, you're coughing up flowers," Bulma interjected, her tone stern. "You've got a literal *garden* growing in your lungs. This is *serious* ."

"I know it's serious, I'm not an idiot," Goku retorted, his irritation evident. "But I don't want to lose a lung. Fighting is everything to me. I can't give that away."

Bulma sighed, her expression a mix of sympathy and determination. "Look, I understand how important fighting is to you, but you can't ignore the severity of your condition just because you don't like the proposed solution."

"I'm not ignoring *anything* , I'm fully aware of the situation, Bulma." Goku protested, his lips pressing into a thin, stubborn line. "But there has to be another way. Something that doesn't involve taking out an entire organ."

Bulma shook her head, frustration and worry warring in her eyes. "Goku, you're not thinking rationally. The condition you're in is critical. We can't afford to waste time looking for alternative solutions that may or may not exist."

"Yeah? Well, what if I don't *want* the surgery?" Goku retorted, his eyes locking with hers defiantly. "What if I refuse…?"

Bulma took a deep breath, her jaw setting firmly. "What? You can't just refuse to cooperate. This isn't about what you want, it's about what you need. If you refuse the surgery, the plants will continue to grow, the damage will become irreversible and you could *die* . Is that what you want?"

The words hung heavy in the air, and silence fell across the room. Goku's expression softened, a flicker of uncertainty crossing his face. He knew she was right, he knew the stakes, but the idea of losing a part of himself, of losing his ability to fight was... "It's not like I haven't died before, but at least I could train in the other world just *fine*... "

When Goku said that, something inside of Vegeta snapped.

"Damn it, Kakarot, now you're just being stubborn!" He couldn't hold back his frustration any longer. "You know this is serious, why can't you just accept that you might have to lose a lung?"

Goku bristled at his words.

"And *you're* just being bossy!" He shot back, his voice rising in anger. "You're so fixated on me losing a lung like it's no big deal. Can't you see how important fighting is to me?"

Without any warning, he doubled over into another coughing fit.

Vegeta cursed himself internally for allowing his emotions to take over, knowing all too well how it could exacerbate the situation. The sight of Goku in such distress, coughing up another batch of flowers, was a stark reminder of the seriousness of the situation and how Goku was somehow refusing to understand it.

"This isn't about me being bossy," he gritted out, his voice rough. "This is about you being idiotic. You're so fixated on fighting, you're willing to risk your life over it? Can't you see how crazy that sounds?"

"Alright. Both of you stop it! Arguing over this isn't going solve *anything*... !" Bulma scolded them, but was primarily looking at Vegeta.

Vegeta bit his tongue, the rebuke from Bulma bringing him back to reality. He knew he had let his temper get the best of him, but hearing Goku being so stubborn was infuriating.

Goku had collapsed back onto his bed, still wheezing and coughing, the strength it had taken to argue with him having sapped his energy. His body shook with the effort of each breath. Each cough had ended in a splatter of bright purple petals across his sheets.

The room then fell silent, only the sound of Goku's labored breathing breaking the tense atmosphere. Bulma stood at Goku's bedside, her eyes filled with a mixture of worry and

sadness. Despite her earlier frustration, her heart broke seeing her friend in such a state.

She could see the turmoil in his face, the battle he was fighting within himself. This was tough, tougher than anything they had ever faced before, and there were no clear-cut answers, no easy resolutions.

Finally, she spoke, her voice gentle but firm. "Goku… I know this isn't what you want to hear. But sometimes, life doesn't give us what we want. It gives us what we need, even if it seems unfair. And right now, you need medical help to survive. The surgery is the best chance we have to save you."

Goku weakly shook his head, his body racked with another round of coughing. His voice was hoarse and raspy from the strain, his eyes glassy. "I don't... I don't want to lose my ability to fight, Bulma… it's part of who I am…"

After Goku's statement, Bulma and Vegeta once again exchanged glances. Their eyes spoke volumes as they shared a look of mutual concern and understanding. Bulma's expression was a mixture of determination and resignation. She knew that Goku was going to be difficult to convince. With a deep sigh, she decided to give him some space to process the situation on his own. "Alright, look. I'll give you some medication for the pain for now, and I'll try to look further into this, to see if there's another solution. But I want you to think about what we've discussed. This isn’t a decision to be taken lightly."

"I know…" Goku could barely nod in response. The effort of the conversation had left him feeling drained.

Bulma gave Goku one last lingering look before leaving the room. The door swung shut behind her, leaving Goku alone with his thoughts. He lay there, his breathing still ragged, the room now engulfed in a heavy silence.

Goku closed his eyes, the reality of his situation seeping through the cracks in his defiant exterior. The idea of losing a lung felt like a part of him would be lost forever. Fighting had been his everything, his entire identity since childhood. It was how he defined himself, his sense of self-worth closely tied to it. The thought of not being able to fight anymore, not being able to protect those he cared about... it was terrifying.

His chest ached, each labored breath a reminder of the plants that had invaded his body. Frustration, anger, and fear swirled within him, a maelstrom of emotions that he couldn’t even *begin* to sift through.

He tried to steady his breathing, but each breath seemed to spark off another violent fit of coughing, leaving him gasping for air and spitting out a fresh wave of bloodied flowers onto the white sheets.

Vegeta watched him painfully, trying not to comment. Just seeing him in this state was more than he could handle.

As Bulma re-entered the room, clutching two vials of medication, Goku's head turned weakly towards her. His body seemed to have settled down a bit from the latest fit of coughing, but there was still a haggard quality to his breathing.

Bulma walked over to the bedside, her expression firm and focused.

"Alright, Goku," Bulma said soothingly. "I'm going to give you a couple of injections through your IV. One is for anxiety and the other one is going to help with the pain. It's morphine."

She was grateful she had left the IV in from before or Goku probably would have flown into another panic, which was the last thing she needed right now.

"Why anxiety?" Goku asked, not wanting to take any more medications than necessary.

Bulma gave him a knowing look as she prepared the syringes for the injection.

She took a moment to consider how to explain it to Goku in a way that he could understand. "From what I've observed, I think there may be a connection between your energy and the growth of these flowers. Your energy is heightened by your emotions, right? Well, when you

get anxious, worried, or upset, your energy spikes up. And that seems to be making the flowers grow faster. So the medication is to keep your emotions in check, to make you feel calmer, that way your energy levels will stay more steady, and hopefully the growth of the flowers will slow down. It's all part of a theory I'm working on."

Bulma's words made sense, in some way. He had always known that his emotions had an impact on his energy levels, and that could, in turn, affect his fighting capabilities. Every time he got angry, his power would shoot up. And just now, he had been arguing with Vegeta, letting his emotions get the better of him. He could see how that might have triggered a more intense bout of coughing.

But the thought of a mere emotion, an emotion of all things, having such a direct impact on the flowers and roots inside him still felt baffling. It made him feel both powerless and vulnerable in ways he'd never felt before. "So... you're saying my emotions are making the plants inside of me grow faster?"

Bulma nodded. "Not just your emotions, but your energy as well. When you get upset, your energy shoots up. It's a normal reaction, and it's what makes you so strong. But right now, that's not something that's good for you. Your energy is feeding the plant, it's like fertilizer for it. The more you resist, the more your energy spikes, and the faster the plant grows."

Goku's eyebrows furrowed as he tried to wrap his mind around the concept. "Hm... I guess that makes sense."

Bulma quickly and efficiently prepared one of the syringes and then inserted it into the IV port on Goku's arm. As the medication began to flow through the tubes and into his body, Goku felt a wave of warmth and heaviness slowly spreading throughout him. The medication worked rapidly to calm his racing thoughts and slowed the hammering of his heart.

When Bulma moved on to the other medication however, Goku felt a sudden sharp pain at the back of his neck as it began to flood his system. He couldn't help but jerk against the sensation, letting out a strangled gasp.

"Ugh, that stuff burns, Bulma!" He managed to croak out through gritted teeth as he clutched his neck.

Bulma winced in sympathy as she watched Goku react to it. "I'm sorry, Goku. That's unfortunately a common side effect of the medication. I'll try to dilute it next time to make it more bearable."

Goku nodded, his face twisted in pain, but he tried to hold still. He had dealt with worse pain before, but the unexpected nature of it was terrible. The burning sensation in his neck intensified for a moment, then slowly began to subside.

As the morphine began to take effect, Goku could feel the heavy veil of pain in his chest and throat start to lift.

The pain in his lungs and throat was still there, but it felt... muffled, faded. As if a blanket had been laid over it, insulating him from it.

The morphine was beginning to take effect. Despite the initial discomfort, the drugs were doing their job. Goku's muscles relaxed, his body sinking into the mattress, his eyes becoming glazed.

It was a strange feeling, to be so detached from his own body, yet it wasn't unpleasant. In fact, it was almost... comforting.

"How are you feeling now?" Bulma asked quietly.

Goku mumbled a reply, words blurring together. "S' better. Head... feels fuzzy."

Bulma laughed softly at Goku's state. "Yeah, that's morphine for you. You're likely gonna feel a bit out of it for a while. Just relax and let the medicine do its job, okay?"

Goku nodded slowly, his movements sluggish. He tried to focus on Bulma, but his eyes eventually drifted shut.

Once Goku seemed to be settled comfortably, Bulma turned her gaze toward Vegeta, who had been watching the scene silently, his expression guarded. The situation was far from ideal, and they both knew it.

"I'm going to go back to my lab for a bit," she said softly. "I want to do some more research, see if I can find anything else that can help. Keep an eye on him, alright?"

Vegeta didn't respond immediately, his eyes still fixed on Goku. But after a moment, he nodded slightly, acknowledging her request.

"Yeah," he grunted, his voice gruff but tinged with a hint of worry. "I'll keep watch."

"Thanks," Bulma murmured, relieved that he wasn't going to argue. "I'll be back as soon as I can."

With one final glance at both Goku and Vegeta, she quietly left the room, shutting the door behind her with a soft click.

The room fell silent once more, save for the steady sound of Goku's slow, heavy breathing.

Slowly, Vegeta moved away from the wall and approached Goku's bedside, his eyes roaming over his rival's still form. The usually boisterous, energetic warrior looked so lifeless now.

He could feel his own energy stirring, the Saiyan instincts within him responding to the situation. He wanted to fight, to attack the unseen enemy that had dared to hurt Kakarot. But there was nothing to fight. No enemy to lash out at. Just an enemy that was growing within Goku's body, one that couldn't be beaten with fists alone.

Sighing, he sat down heavily on the edge of the bed, Vegeta's hand hovering hesitantly over Goku's face, his fingers trembling slightly. With a shaky inhale, he gently brushed a strand of

hair back from Goku's forehead, his hand lingering there for a moment longer than necessary.

Damn it, Kakarot...

You're not supposed to be like this. You're supposed to be awake and smiling, annoying me with that stupid optimistic attitude of yours. Not... not laying here, looking like some fragile doll.

…

Bulma was deep in concentration. She had been researching for hours, pouring over medical journals, research notes, and every piece of information she could find on plants and organ damage. She had even used some of her contacts in the scientific community to get access to some unpublished research.

But, so far, she had come up empty-handed. No answers, no leads, no solutions. Frustration was slowly creeping in, mixing with the worry for her friend since childhood.

She took a break, sighing loudly and rubbing her temples. The computer screen in front of her taunted her with its lack of results. She couldn't help but feel a sense of helplessness. Despite all her knowledge and resources, she couldn't find anything that could explain what was happening to Goku, let alone cure it.

She glanced at the clock. It was almost midnight already? She knew she needed rest, she had already pulled an all nighter before Goku had stumbled into her lab sick that day, but the thought of leaving Goku's condition unsolved kept nagging at her. Grumbling, she took a sip of coffee and started searching again, determined to find something, anything.

Dr. Briefs entered the lab, a mug of coffee in his hand. He saw the tired, frustrated look on Bulma's face and approached her. "Working late again?"

"Yeah," Bulma replied, not looking away from the computer screen, her fingers tapping the desk impatiently. "I'm trying to figure out what's wrong with Goku."

Dr. Briefs nodded, concern flickering across his face. "I heard he's not doing well. What's going on with him?"

Bulma finally leaned back in her chair, sighing deeply. "It's... complicated. He's got some kind of... growth inside of his lung. Plants, I think. He's been coughing a lot and it's making it hard for him to breathe. I've been searching for a solution but…"

"You've come up empty-handed?" Dr. Briefs finished for her.

Bulma nodded, frustration clear on her face. "I don't know what else to do. I've looked into everything, but I can't find anything that matches his symptoms. This whole thing is just... bizarre."

Dr. Briefs hummed thoughtfully. "Sounds like a real head-scratcher, but perhaps you should consider looking into supernatural causes for his illness."

"Supernatural? What, you mean like magic or something?" Bulma deadpanned.

Dr. Briefs chuckled again. "I know it sounds silly, but just humor me. Have you ever heard of something called 'Hanahaki disease'?"

"I'm not sure," she admitted honestly. "What is it?"

Dr. Briefs placed his coffee mug down on the counter, his eyes taking on a distant look, like he was remembering something. "I came across it in one of my books once. It's a rare condition where, in a nutshell, a person coughs up flowers because of unrequited love."

"Unrequited love? You're joking, right?" Bulma clearly wasn't amused.

Dr. Briefs chuckled at her skepticism and explained, "No, I'm serious. Hanahaki disease exists in old folklore and stories. It's said to occur when someone has deep, romantic feelings for someone else, but those feelings aren't returned or acknowledged. As a result, they develop a physical illness where they start coughing up flower petals, a symbol of their unrequited love."

Bulma's disbelief was still visible on her face.

"Sounds like an old wives' tale," she rolled her eyes.

Dr. Briefs sighed and leaned against the counter, "I understand your skepticism, but sometimes old legends do contain some elements of truth. Just think about it, Bulma. You're a woman of science. Don't ignore the possibility just because it falls outside of your comfort zone."

Bulma thought for a moment. She had firsthand experience with the seemingly impossible, and not only with the Dragon Balls but many other things as well. And while she was still highly skeptical, she couldn't help but wonder if there could be some truth to this 'Hanahaki disease'.

"Alright, fine, let's say this disease is real," she said, folding her arms. "How do you even cure it? Do you just... give a love confession or something to make it go away?"

Dr. Briefs chuckled softly. "I'm afraid it's not that simple. From what I've read, the only cure for hanahaki disease is for the person's feelings to be returned. In other words, the person they love has to reciprocate their feelings."

Bulma's skepticism returned. "That's ridiculous. You're telling me the only way to cure this 'disease' is through some fairytale romance?"

Dr. Briefs shrugged, "Well, that *is* what the stories say. Hanahaki disease is tied to the power of love itself, and the only cure is for the love to be acknowledged and reciprocated."

Bulma huffed in apparent frustration. But her scientist's mind was working, processing this new information, no matter how far-fetched it seemed.

"So then, what if, hypothetically," she began, her skepticism giving way to a hint of curiosity, "the person they love is... unreachable, or doesn't feel the same way?"

Dr. Briefs considered this for a moment, then answered gently, "Well, that's where it gets tricky. In those situations, the stories say that the disease progresses. The person will continue to cough up flower petals until they can no longer breathe due to the flowers that have bloomed within their lungs. If left untreated, the disease will eventually lead to death."

Bulma's eyes widened in shock and horror.

"Death?" she repeated, almost in a whisper, her skepticism now completely shattered. The idea of someone dying because of their feelings, because of *love* , shook her to the core. She couldn't believe it. She didn't *want* to believe it. "...Dad, this isn't a fairytale. There's got to be some logical explanation for this."

Dr. Briefs looked at her sympathetically, understanding her shock. "I know it's a lot to take in, honey, but try to keep an open mind. We've seen all kinds of things in this world that defy both logic *and* science. It's possible that this disease does have an explanation, but we just don't understand it yet."

Reluctantly, Bulma thought over his words, about to dismiss him again, when, all of a sudden, a memory tugged at her, a vague recollection of a conversation about this exact disease.

"Wait," She said slowly, her mind beginning to whirr. "I think I might have heard about this before. But…"

She thought back to her teenage years, to her friends and their talks about romance and crushes. Yes, she had heard about this before, in bits and pieces, in whisperings and gossip.

But after further research, she had simply brushed it off as childish nonsense, as fantasy, something only found in stories and not reality.

She trailed off, her thoughts going back to Goku. It seemed so ridiculous, so surreal to even consider. Goku and unrequited love? It sounded absurd. But then again, what other explanation was there?

"But what?" Dr. Briefs prompted, seeing the gears turning in Bulma's mind.

She let out a long breath.

"It's just... it's hard to believe. I mean, Goku and unrequited love? It just doesn't seem... possible." She said, more to herself than her father. "He isn't pining after anyone. He's not the type to be in love with someone and keep quiet about it. He's too straightforward for that."

Dr. Briefs smiled slightly, the wrinkles around his eyes deepening. "You'd be surprised, dear. Love isn't always as obvious or straightforward as you may think. And unrequited love... well, it has a way of sneaking up on you. Even the simplest, kindest hearts can be affected."

Bulma's mind was racing. If this was true, if this disease *was* caused by unrequited love and Goku was affected, then that meant he was in love. But with *who* ? And why hadn't he said anything? It just didn't make sense.

"This is so messed up," she muttered. "If this hanahaki disease is real, then..."

Dr. Briefs interrupted her, his voice sympathetic. "Then, you need to find out who Goku's in love with. And fast. If he's coughing up flowers, it means the disease is advancing. The longer it goes untreated, the worse it'll get."

Bulma couldn't believe what she was hearing. Love, unrequited love, and some random supernatural illness were not part of her medical repertoire. Medicine was supposed to be

about facts, not feelings and love. Yet, the more her father spoke, the more she couldn't shake the feeling that he might be right.

Bulma nodded, her mind working overtime. Despite her skepticism, she realized her father had a point. She needed to keep all possibilities on the table, even the ones that seemed outlandish.

"...Fine, I guess I'll have to dig deeper into this," she said, more to herself than to her father. "In the meantime, I need to give Goku more medication soon. I should also probably have him stick to a liquid diet for now. It's best not to strain his system too much with solids until we figure out what's going on for certain."

Dr. Briefs patted her shoulder, understanding the complexity of her situation. "That sounds like a good plan, dear. Just remember to keep and open mind as you're researching, sometimes the answers can be found in the most unexpected places."

With a final nod, he left the lab, leaving Bulma alone with her computer.

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END CHAPTER 6

Chapter 7

Story: A Heart's Bloom, Chapter 7

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Despite how convincing of an argument her father had made, Bulma was still unsure of what to believe. Her scientific mind told her that there had to be a logical explanation, a medical reason for Goku's condition. But the more she researched, the more the symptoms seemed to line up with what Goku was experiencing.

Her mind then wandered back to her childhood friend and the possibility of him being in love. Who could it be? It had to be someone she knew, right? Unless it was some new girl he had met, or maybe he had fallen back in love with Chichi, but that seemed unlikely. Goku was straightforward and wore his heart on his sleeve; if he was in love, he would say something, wouldn't he? Unless he was afraid of rejection, and thought the person wouldn't feel the same way…

"This is so damn complicated," Bulma muttered to herself, her eyes flickering over the articles and studies popping up on the computer screen. No matter how hard she looked, she couldn't find any definitive answers. It was like the more she tried to understand, the more the truth slipped away from her, wrapped in the mystery of a disease that shouldn't even exist.

Bulma finally pushed away from the computer, rubbing her eyes wearily. The information was all starting to blur together, and she couldn't focus on it anymore. She needed a break.

She stood up and stretched, her muscles protesting from sitting in one position for so long. Grabbing Goku's medication, she headed towards his room. When she reached it, she knocked softly on the door before entering.

The room was dimly lit, and Goku was lying in bed, his eyes half-open, his breathing slightly labored. She approached the bed, perching on the edge.

"Hey," she said softly, reaching for his hand resting on the blankets. "I brought your pain medication, Goku."

Vegeta, who was sitting at Goku's bedside with his arms crossed, glanced up, his face still stern. He acknowledged her with a brief nod, his eyes flickering between her and Goku. He was uncharacteristically silent, his mind a tangled mess of worry, confusion, and a sense of helplessness.

He watched as Bulma checked Goku's vitals, gave him his medication, and then began to make arrangements for the liquid food diet. He could see the concern and the determination in her eyes, and he knew she was trying everything she could to help Goku.

Despite his own worries, Vegeta couldn't help but admire Bulma's relentless determination. She had always been the brains behind their team, her intelligence and resourcefulness often saving their hides. But seeing her like this, determined to find a solution to this mysterious disease, reminded him why he had fallen in love with her in the first place. And although his feelings for her had changed since then, he still had a lot of respect for her.

Goku groaned softly as the morphine took effect. This time, she had diluted it however, making the pain somewhat more tolerable. Nevertheless, he still winced, his body weakened and sensitive to any extra strain.

Bulma noticed Goku's reaction and quickly reassured him. "It's alright, Goku. I've adjusted the medicine a bit, so it should be easier on your body. Just try to relax, okay? I'll inject it slowly this time."

Goku managed a weak nod, his eyes half-lidded. It was still a little painful, but the morphine being diluted provided some relief. He let his head fall back against the pillows, focusing on his breathing as Bulma gently administered the injection.

Once the injection was done, Bulma stepped back and ran a hand through her hair. "Listen, I'm going to have someone bring you some food from the cafeteria now, alright? Since it's a liquid diet, it should be easier for you to handle. Try to eat a little bit when it arrives."

Goku nodded slowly, his voice sounding a bit hoarse. "Thanks, Bulma..."

Bulma smiled back. "No problem. Just rest and focus on getting better, okay?" She gave his hand another gentle squeeze before exiting the room.

Once she was gone, Goku was left alone with his thoughts. He could still feel the lingering pain and the tightness in his chest, but it was dulled thanks to the medication. The room was silent except for the sound of his own labored breathing.

A part of him ached to be up and about, training and being active like he usually was. But the reality of his condition held him prisoner in this bed, forcing him to accept he wasn't invincible, after all.

He soon found his thoughts interrupted by a soft knock on the door, and a staff member entered with a tray of food. The sight of food made Goku's stomach rumble in a way that felt almost foreign to him.

The staff member smiled kindly and placed the tray on the bedside table. "I have your meal, Mr. Son, as per Ms. Bulma's instructions."

Goku mumbled his thanks to the staff member, looking at the tray filled with various liquids. There was broth, jello, ice cream, and some fruit juices.

As Goku's gaze lingered on the tray, Vegeta, who had been silently watching, noticed his reluctance. "You should eat something."

"I know," Goku said, his voice barely above a whisper. "I just... I don't really have much appetite right now."

Vegeta scowled, his irritation clear on his face. "Appetite or not, you need to keep your strength up. Otherwise, won't have the energy to fight whatever it is causing this."

Goku knew Vegeta was right, even if he didn't want to admit it. So, with a sigh, he picked up a spoonful of broth and ate it. It was good, and thanks to the pain medication Bulma had given him, his throat wasn't nearly as sore right now so he was actually able to swallow it.

Vegeta watched him silently, his expression still stern, but there was a hint of relief in his eyes. It was good that he was eating, even if it was only a small amount.

"And make sure you finish it all," he ordered gruffly. "Bulma's doing everything she can to help you, but you have to do your part too. Understand?"

"I will…" Goku reluctantly took another mouthful of broth, the warm liquid sliding down his throat and bringing some sense of normalcy. He hadn't even realized how hungry or thirsty he even was until he started eating.

Goku slowly worked his way through the meal, finishing the broth and jello relatively easily. The coldness of the jello was a nice contrast to the warm broth, and it felt good going down his throat.

With the broth and jello finished, Goku's eyes moved to the ice cream, still untouched on the plate. turned his gaze to the ice cream, before staring at it for a moment. "It's bubble gum flavored? That's... odd."

Vegeta, who had watched him eat, raised an eyebrow at Goku's comment. "Something wrong with bubble gum flavored?"

"No, I've just... Never heard of it before..." Goku noted.

Vegeta was taken aback by Goku's response.

"You've never heard of bubble gum ice cream before?" he asked, surprised. "Where have you been living, under a rock?"

Goku laughed weakly, shaking his head.

"No, not living under a rock," he managed. "Just... never had the chance to try it, I guess. Not something I can afford on a regular basis, y'know?"

Vegeta's eyes widened slightly. While Goku's family wasn't exactly poor per say, they also didn't have the kind of money to splurge on whatever they wanted. More often than not, they had just enough to cover their basic necessities. Most of the food they had was stuff that Goku either caught or farmed himself.

He supposed it was just yet another reminder of the stark contrasts in their lives. But still… It was just ice cream, it shouldn't have been *that* big of a deal, right? Then again, Goku was a simple person. Outside of fighting, he never asked for much.

"Well, you're having it now, aren't you?" He said gruffly, looking away and trying to hide the empathy he was feeling. "So stop staring and eat it already, before it starts melting."

Goku tried a spoonful of it, his eyes widening in surprise. It was like nothing he'd ever tasted before. The sweet, sugary flavor of bubble gum mingled with the coolness of the ice cream, creating an explosion of sweetness in his mouth.

"Wow...." he mumbled, his face lighting up with childlike wonder. "This tastes delicious!"

"You really like it that much, huh?" Vegeta said, a slight hint of amusement in his tone.

But as goku took another bite, licking his lips and humming in satisfaction, Vegeta shifted uncomfortably, feeling heat rising within him. He observed Goku's blissful expression and

the way he savored each bite, his tongue darting out to lap up the melting treat.

Vegeta had never seen somebody enjoy something so simple with such obvious delight, but something about his unabashed pleasure was… Arousing.

Fuck!

He quickly looked away, his cheeks red. He scolded himself internally for responding this way. This wasn't the time or place for this.

…

The room had fallen into a brief silence after Goku finished his meal, the soft hum of the air conditioner filling the room. He sat up in bed, his gaze fixed out the window at the large full moon in the night sky.

Goku's expression had grown a bit somber, his thoughts seemingly elsewhere. The silvery light of the moon highlighted his weary features, making him look even more pensive.

Vegeta, who had been silently observing, noticed the change in Goku's demeanor. He had known Goku long enough to know when something was bothering him.

"Something on your mind?" he asked gruffly, breaking the silence.

Goku paused for a moment before answering, his gaze wavering.

"Mnmn." He shook his head, smiling weakly. "No, it's nothing."

Vegeta huffed, obviously not believing him.

"You're a terrible liar, Kakarot." he retorted, his arms crossing over his chest. "I know that look. Something's eating at you. Out with it."

Goku looked down, as if he wanted to say something, but in the end he let out a small cough, trying to sit up. "Don't worry about it. It's not that important. If you don't mind, though, I'd kinda like to take a bath. I feel sticky."

Vegeta raised an eyebrow, clearly unconvinced that it wasn't important, but he let it slide for now. He could always pry later. Right now, Goku asking to take a bath was a much more pressing concern.

"Fine, but you think you can even stay upright long enough to do that?" he questioned, a hint of skepticism in his tone.

"I'm actually not sure." Goku struggled to reply. "You might have to carry me again."

Vegeta huffed once more, rolling his eyes.

"Seriously…? You're too heavy, you know that?" he grumbled, getting up from his chair. "But I guess I don't have much choice, do I?"

He walked over to the side of the bed, and for yet another time that day, scooped Goku up into his arms.

He carried him to the bathroom, careful that he didn't jostle him too much. Once inside, he carefully set Goku on the toilet.

"How hot do you want the water?" he asked.

Goku was already starting to feel a bit dizzy just from sitting up, but he managed to give a small smile. "Just warm, I think. I don't want to pass out in the tub."

Vegeta nodded and reached over to start the water. He waited a few moments, testing the temperature, until it was just right. Then he turned back to Goku. "Alright, it's ready. Think you can manage getting undressed on your own?"

Goku grimaced. He tried to move, but the dizziness made it hard. "Can you... help me out? I'm still a bit dizzy."

"...Fine, but you owe me for this," Vegeta grumbled and let out a small sigh, blushing furiously. Helping someone else get undressed wasn't normally something he did.

When Vegeta reached for his pants buckle, Goku couldn't help but feel a bit of embarrassment, his cheeks becoming a light hue of pink.

Vegeta's hands were surprisingly gentle as he worked at the fastenings of Goku's pants, his fingers deftly undoing the buckle and tugging at the zipper. He could feel Goku's embarrassment, the way he was blushing slightly, and he couldn't help but find it a bit endearing.

He pulled his pants down, leaving Goku in just his boxers. He didn't look away, his gaze taking in every dip and contour of Goku's body, the sharp lines of his hips and the strength of his thighs.

He swallowed hard, the sight of Goku's body sending a jolt of desire through him. But he quickly squashed the feeling, reminding himself that this wasn't about that. This was about taking care of Goku in his weakened state, nothing more.

He reached up and gently hooked his fingers under the elastic of Goku's boxers, starting to pull them down. He moved slowly, giving Goku time to stop him if he wanted.

But Goku didn't protest. He lifted his hips slightly to make it easier, his eyes shut in embarrassment. It felt strange to have Vegeta helping him like this, but truth be told, it felt nice, even if it was a little awkward.

Vegeta couldn't help but notice the way Goku's body quivered faintly beneath his touch, the way the muscles in his abdomen tensed and relaxed.

He let the boxers fall to the floor, leaving Goku half naked. He tried to keep his eyes from roaming too freely over Goku's body, but it was hard. Goku's skin was flawless, soft and well toned, tempting him to reach out and touch him, to feel the heat of his skin against his palm.

He crouched down, his hands moving to Goku's feet. "Lift your foot."

Goku obeyed, lifting his foot slightly off the floor. Vegeta's hands wrapped around his ankle, carefully helping him out of his pants and underwear.

With each item of clothing removed, more and more of Goku's body was revealed, the lean contour of his muscles gleaming under the bathroom lights. It wasn't like Vegeta had never seen him naked before, but it was proving to be more distracting than he cared to admit.

His hands were steady as he maneuvered Goku's arms out of his sleeves, the fabric slipping off and leaving him bare chested.

He let the shirt fall to the floor, his eyes roaming over the newly exposed skin. The broad expanse of Goku's chest and the ridges of his abdominal muscles were almost hypnotic, and he couldn't resist the urge to lightly brush his fingers over the smooth surface.

But he quickly snapped out of it, having to remind himself yet again that he needed to focus on washing Goku and getting him cleaned up, not on how damn good he looked without a shirt on.

He forced his eyes back to Goku's face, once again taking notice of the flush on his cheeks and the slight rise and fall of his chest. He swallowed hard at the sight, silently cursing himself for his own reaction.

"I'm putting you in the tub now." He scooped him up back up and carefully lowered him in. Goku let out a sigh of relief as the warmth enveloped his body.

Vegeta let out a quiet huff, realizing that Goku wouldn't be able to do much in his current state. Sitting at the edge of the tub, and making sure Goku didn't sink into the water, he grabbed a cloth and some soap, grumbling something incomprehensive underneath his breath.

Goku relaxed as Vegeta began to massage some soap over his body and into his hair. The soft, warm water and the gentle touch of Vegeta's hands eased the pain and tension in his body. Some part of him wanted him to touch him more, but he kept that thought to himself, knowing it was inappropriate and wouldn't be appreciated.

Vegeta tried his best to focus on what he was doing, his hands moving over Goku's skin in a methodical, almost clinical way. But the feeling of Goku's body under his fingers, the warmth of the water - it was all starting to get to him. He could feel his own body reacting, a slow, growing heat starting to pool in the pit of his stomach. He forced himself to ignore it, concentrating on the task at hand.

He worked the cloth over Goku's shoulders, down his arms, and over his chest, his touch firm but gentle. It was taking all of his willpower to not let them wander too long, to not let them explore the curves and planes of Goku's body more freely.

Goku's eyes were closed, a peaceful expression on his face. He let out a soft sigh as Vegeta worked the cloth over his skin, the warm water and the gentle touch soothing him.

A part of him wanted to lean back into the touch, to feel more of Vegeta's hands on him, but he kept those thoughts to himself, not sure if they would be welcome. Instead, he let himself be pampered, enjoying the simple pleasure of being cared for.

Vegeta's touch was efficient, the soap lathered over Goku's body like a practiced dance. He moved down Goku's stomach and over his abdomen, the cloth caressing the dips and ridges of his muscles.

Vegeta's heart was pounding in his chest, the heat of the water, the feel of Goku's body under his hands, it was all making it hard for him to concentrate.

He moved the cloth lower, his hand brushing over Goku's hip, his fingers gliding over the smooth skin. He swallowed hard, his eyes flicking up to Goku's face for a moment, making sure he was still calm and relaxed.

Goku's expression was peaceful, his eyes still closed, his body a picture of tranquility. It was clear the idiot was enjoying being pampered like this, and his complacency only made it harder for Vegeta to keep his urges in check.

But Goku was weak and vulnerable. Vegeta knew he couldn't take advantage of him like that. He had to keep his emotions under control. He forced his thoughts back to the task at hand, the cloth continuing its journey over Goku's legs and feet, his touch firm but gentle on his muscles. He kept his eyes fixed on what he was doing, not looking away but refusing to let his gaze wander over the expanse of Goku's exposed body.

When he was done, he set the cloth aside and took a deep breath, trying to steady himself. Finally, he picked up a bottle of shampoo and poured some into his hands, massaging it into Goku's hair.

Goku let out a small moan as Vegeta's hands worked the shampoo into his hair, the gentle pressure on his scalp sending a wave of relaxation through his body. It felt incredible.

As his fingers combed through the strands, Vegeta let his gaze roam over Goku's face, taking in the relaxed expression and slight flush on his cheeks. Once the shampoo was thoroughly worked in, he reached for the showerhead and slowly rinsed out the suds.

The warm water cascaded over Goku's head, leaving his hair clean and fragrant. Vegeta couldn't help but admire the way the water ran over Goku's face, the way it clung to his

eyelashes and dripped down his neck.

"Thanks for helping me out by the way. You're a lifesaver." Goku murmured, his voice hoarse as Vegeta turned the water off and unplugged the drain.

"Don't mention it." The prince grunted in acknowledgement, grabbing a towel. He took a moment to dry off the damp strands of Goku's hair, before moving down to his neck and shoulders, the rough texture of the towel rubbing against the soft, wet skin. He could feel the way his muscles flexed beneath his touch, and the way the heat of Goku's body seemed to seep into his own, making it difficult to carry out the task without distraction. "You're clean now."

He tried not to stare as he lifted Goku out of the tub and setting him down on the closed toilet lid, a bit of water dripping onto the floor. He then wrapped the towel around Goku's waist to provide a bit of modesty, trying to ignore the thoughts and feelings that were rapidly swirling through his head.

"Stay here," he said, before leaving the bathroom momentarily. He returned a few seconds later with a hairdryer in hand.

He plugged the hairdryer into an outlet and switched it on, the sound of the motor filling the bathroom. He then moved closer to Goku, lifting the hairdryer and beginning to run it through his damp hair. He directed the hot air over Goku's head, trying to get him as dry as possible. After several minutes, he turned off the hairdryer and set it aside.

Vegeta then grabbed the pile of dirty clothes and walked over to the hamper in the corner of the bathroom. He roughly tossed them inside, the sound of fabric hitting the woven basket breaking the silence.

He paused for a moment, contemplating the situation. Goku was still too weak to put on clothes himself, and he needed something comfortable to wear. Vegeta made a mental note to go find him a suitable nightshirt or gown.

He turned back to Goku, his gaze lingering on the man for a moment. "I'll go find you something to wear. Stay right here."

Without waiting for an answer, he walked out of the bathroom, heading for the wardrobe in the bedroom. Inside, he began to rifle through the neatly folded clothes, looking for something suitable. His mind was still a jumble of thoughts from the recent events, each one more confusing than the last.

His eyes drifted over the various pieces of clothing, finally landing on a soft cotton nightgown. It was large and loose-fitting, with a light material and a comfortable design. It would be perfect considering Goku's current condition.

He picked it up, also grabbing a pair of boxers to go with it, before heading back to the bathroom.

When he returned, he found Goku sitting exactly as he left him, wrapped in the towel, but looking a little paler than before. His head lolled to the side, his eyes seeming unfocused.

"Here," Vegeta grunted, holding up the nightgown. "It's the best I could find on short notice. Give me your hands…"

Goku obediently lifted his hands and allowed Vegeta to guide them into the sleeves of the nightgown, one at a time before Vegeta lifted the nightgown over his head and helped him slip it on. Once it was on, it looked a bit oversized, the material pooling at Goku's thighs, but it was comfortable and practical.

Vegeta then knelt down in front of Goku, adjusting the nightgown so it would not wrinkle unnecessarily. With quick and efficient movement, he grabbed the boxers and started to pull them up Goku's legs, one at a time.

As he did, he was hyper-aware of the intimacy of the situation. He could feel the warmth of Goku's legs, the smoothness of his skin, and the way the nightgown gently fell over him as he moved.

He quickly finished putting on Goku's boxers, trying to ignore the strange thrill he felt from being so close to him, the way his heart was beating a little faster.

"There," he muttered, taking a step back. He brushed a strand of hair out of Goku's face but didn't move away completely. "Now you look less like a bedraggled mess."

Goku didn't respond. The medication and the day's exertion had clearly taken their toll. Vegeta wanted to speak, to express the confusing mix of emotions swirling within him, but he didn't know how. So he held his tongue, watching as Goku slumped back against the toilet seat and leaned his head against the wall behind him.

As much as he hated to admit it, he wanted to make sure Goku was comfortable, even if that required a bit more intimacy than he was okay with.

"Come on, we're getting you back to bed." He gently slid his arms under Goku's legs and around his back, hoisting him up with a soft grunt.

Ignoring the fluttering in his chest, he navigated through the hallway, trying not to jostle Goku too much as he walked. The man was practically half-asleep at this point, his head resting against Vegeta's shoulder.

He reached the bedroom and gently laid Goku back down on the bed, before shifting his body into a comfortable position. But as his fingers suddenly brushed against the bare skin of Goku's thighs, he couldn't help the way his face heated up.

He pulled the gown back into place, his fingers moving quickly and efficiently to cover Goku's exposed skin. As he laid the quilt over him, his heart hammered in his chest, the fluttering in his stomach and getting stronger.

Why does this blasted fool have to be so damn attractive?

Vegeta let out a frustrated sigh and took a seat in a chair beside Goku's bedside. As he watched the steady rise and fall of Goku's chest and the way his hair spilled across the pillow, he couldn't help but be drawn to the dip between his shoulder and neck. He found himself wondering what it would be like to kiss it.

Vegeta cursed himself for letting his imagination run wild, but the images of Goku's bare legs and soft skin were like a fire in his mind, consuming his every thought.

He wanted to reach out and touch him. To feel his body against his own-

FuckfuckFUCK!

Vegeta ran a hand through his hair in desperation, trying to steady his racing heart.

He shifted in his chair in an attempt to find a more comfortable position, but the tightness of his pants was impossible to ignore. The fabric felt constricting and uncomfortable against his skin, the sensation only making the situation worse.

"What the hell is wrong with me…?" He cursed under his breath, his cheeks heating with both arousal and embarrassment, wanting more than anything to shake off the feelings that were coursing through his veins.

He glanced down at Goku again, the sight of his relaxed form on the bed doing nothing to cool his heated blood.

Finally, he couldn't take it anymore. He had to get out of there, he need air and space to clear his head of these thoughts and feelings.

Again.

He stood up abruptly, causing the chair to screech against the floor. The noise was loud in the quiet room, causing Goku to wake back up.

"What's goin' on?" Goku mumbled groggily, sitting up and rubbing his eyes as Vegeta was heading to the door. "Where're you going?"

"I'm just going out for a walk," Vegeta replied, not even turning around to look at Goku. His voice was gruff and tense, betraying the inner turmoil he was experiencing. "I need some air. I'll be back in a few minutes."

Goku's brows furrowed slightly. He knew something was off. Vegeta's tone, his body language... there was something he wasn't telling him. But he knew better than to push the issue further.

"Oh, okay," he said quietly, the words barely above a whisper. It was just a few minutes, right?

Vegeta gave Goku one last glance, before quickly turning and heading out of the room. The moment he was outside, he let out a breath he didn't know he'd been holding in, but it did little to soothe the turmoil inside him.

He couldn't stop picturing Goku's body under the quilt, remembering the way his soft skin felt under his fingertips, imagine the sounds he would make if he-

Why is this bothering me so much?

He clenched his fists, gritting his teeth in frustration.

This would be so much easier if we could just go back to the way things were before.

With a huff of irritation, he stormed off to the gravity chamber.

Training would be the only sure fire way to get this out of his head.

…

END CHAPTER 7

Chapter 8

Story: A Heart's Bloom, Chapter 8

…

The silence in the room was thick and heavy, the only sound being the steady hum of the air conditioning unit. Goku lay in bed, his eyes staring blankly at the ceiling, his thoughts a whirl of confusion.

Where had Vegeta gone? He knew he had said he would return in a few minutes, but the wait felt endless, especially in his current state. He shifted restlessly, trying to find a more comfortable position, but his body ached too much.

He couldn't stand it. He was so used to fighting, to being active and moving around, so being stuck in bed like this made him feel like a caged animal, restless and anxious for freedom.

Minutes ticked by like hours, each passing moment filled with unease. Despite his exhaustion, Goku couldn't shake the feeling of isolation.

Where could he be?

As that thought washed over him, he thought back to the way Vegeta had been behaving before this, how he had been actively avoiding him for months. A sinking feeling settled in his stomach. Was this just a continuation of that?

Frustration rose up within him, intermixing with the confusion and longing he already felt. His mind wandered, recalling the memories from that evening and night.

The feeling of Vegeta's hands on his skin, his gentle touch as he had washed him, how safe he had felt in his arms…

It made Goku's chest ache. It didn't matter that Vegeta wasn't in love with him. Just being near him again, feeling his presence... It had been so nice.

But it was clear that Vegeta wanted nothing to do with him, that he wanted to get as far away from him as possible. And that realization hurt more than Goku cared to admit. He swallowed back the lump in his throat, trying to ignore the stinging at the corners of his eyes.

Why was this happening? What had he done to make Vegeta not want to be around him anymore?

He wanted to fix it, to make things go back to normal. Even if Vegeta did just see him as a rival, he was okay with that. After all, he was used to Vegeta's insults and taunts. They were a part of who he was. But this – this silence, being avoided – it was something else entirely.

He closed his eyes, trying to will away the tears that were threatening to fall. He just missed Vegeta, missed them being able to spar together.

The memories of their fights, their training, the way they used to argue and bicker back and forth... It was ironic, how much he had missed the one person who had been causing him the most pain. But Goku had always been like that, seeing the best in people, even when they didn't deserve it.

He let out a shaky breath, closing his eyes as he pulled the covers a bit tighter around himself, trying to draw comfort from the warm fabric. But it offered no respite from the pain in his heart.

As his thoughts spiraled, the familiar tightness began to form in his chest again. He coughed once, then again, and the next moment, he was hacking up another batch of flowers. They splattered against the sheets and the quilt in a sickening pattern of blood.

He tried to hold them back, but they kept coming. It was as if the thoughts and emotions swirling inside of him was coalescing into a physical form. The medication was only doing so much much to numb it.

Each gasp was agony, the flowers clawing their way up his throat. It seemed to go on for an eternity, the pain and the frustration blending together until they became one single, overwhelming feeling.

As it continued, he noticed the familiar tingling sensation in his arms again, a sense of coldness settling over his limbs. Fear began to rise within him, knowing immediately that something was wrong.

His hands were like ice, and the feeling had spread from his fingers to his wrists. He tried to move them, clench his fists, but they barely budged. They felt heavy and foreign, like they didn’t belong to him.

As the numbness spread higher up his arms, Goku could feel exhaustion overcoming him. His body was screaming at him to rest, every movement a struggle against the heavy, unresponsive limbs.

He wanted to fight against it, to stay awake and figure out what was happening to him, but eventually, he couldn't hold on any longer. His eyelids felt like lead weights, heavy and impossible to keep open.

The world started to darken, the edges of his vision blurring and blackening. The numbness was still there, that feeling of coldness now crawling up his shoulders, but sleep was pulling him under too strongly to fight it. He closed his eyes, the darkness swallowing him whole.

…

Bulma sat hunched over her desk, surrounded by a mountain of books and research papers. The room was lit only by her computer and the single-bulb lamp above her desk, creating a pool of light that contrasted with the dimness surrounding it.

She was so focused, so engrossed in her work that she didn’t notice when the sun rose outside the window, signaling the start of a new day. Her eyes didn’t leave the computer in front of her, her brain tirelessly processing the information on it.

At first, she hadn't wanted to take her father seriously when he suggested some disease out of a fairy tale, but the more she read, the more the symptoms had lined up.

The flowers growing in his lungs, the coughing fits, the pain in his chest. Everything fit so perfectly that it was almost eerie. It shouldn’t be real, shouldn’t be possible, but there it was, right in front of her eyes, outlined in black and white on the computer screen.

As Bulma continued her research, she had also come across mentions of a peculiar side effect in relation to the surgical removal of the flowers.

Memory loss.

Even if the surgery was successful, it would result in the loss of the memories of the person the host loved the most. The very person who hadn't been able to reciprocate these feelings, leading to the disease in the first place.

She leaned back in her chair, rubbing her eyes. The more she learned, the more complicated the situation seemed to become. There were no easy answers, no simple solutions. Surgery might save Goku's life, but at what cost?

His memories? His emotional wellbeing?

She sighed, shutting her eyes. It was like a cruel test, like the universe was playing a cruel joke on one of the most genuine, kindest people she knew.

She looked at the clock on her wall. It was now morning. She began to wonder if Vegeta had done as told and stayed with Goku or, as in line with normal Vegeta fashion, walked off and left him alone all night.

She stood up, her muscles aching from countless hours of inactivity. She needed to check on Goku, and make sure he was okay.

As she left the lab, she made her way towards Goku's guest room, her steps measured and quiet. The building was mostly quiet, save for the hushed whispering of some of the employees.

Once she reached her destination, Bulma knocked softly on the door, not wanting to startle him. There was no sound from within.

She pushed down the handle and slowly opened the door. The room was darkened, the early morning sun blocked by the closed curtains.

Goku was lying motionless under the quilt. The sight of him so still, so vulnerable, filled her with a sense of dread. She moved closer, leaning down to check his breathing and pulse.

She felt a wave of relief wash over her as she noticed the subtle rise and fall of his chest. At least he was breathing normally for now. But his skin…

It was even paler than before and… cold. Both symptoms of reduced blood circulation.

Her eyes were drawn to the blood-stained flowers that were scattered all over the bed. They were in full bloom, their purple petals stained a deep red.

She knew what this meant. The flowers were taking over his lungs and cutting off his blood supply. But how far had they spread, and how quickly? She needed to know more.

"Goku? Goku, wake up. Can you hear me?" She shook his shoulder, her mind racing.

Goku's eyes fluttered open slowly, but they were clouded, disoriented. He seemed to take a moment to recognize her, his brow furrowed slightly.

"Bulma…?" The word came out as a hoarse whisper, his throat clearly irritated and raw. He groaned weakly as he tried to sit up, but his body refused to cooperate. His head felt fuzzy and heavy, the pain in his chest unbearable. The coughs shook his frame, each one bringing up more of the dreaded flowers.

Bulma sat on the edge of the bed, her hand on his shoulder, offering what little comfort she could. "Goku, how are you feeling?" she asked, her voice full of concern.

He managed a weak response, his eyes unfocused and bleary. "I... I don't know... Everything hurts. I can barely breathe. Where's Vegeta? He... he said he'd come back, but he didn't..."

Of course he didn't. Bulma couldn't keep the annoyance out of her voice. "He's around somewhere, don't worry about him. You need to focus on yourself right now."

Goku let out a small whine of disappointment but couldn't hold back another cough. His head sank back onto the pillow, the energy for even a simple conversation clearly beyond him.

"Do you want some more pain medication?" Bulma asked softly.

Goku gave a faint nod, not wanting to say anything in his current state. The pain was starting to overwhelm him, adding another layer of misery to his already dire condition.

Bulma looked down at Goku, the concern for his well-being etched all over her face. "Alright, I'll be right back, don't move."

As she made her way through the building, she couldn't help but wonder again where Vegeta had gone. He had promised to stay and look after Goku, and yet, he was nowhere to be seen. The thought only added to her frustrations.

…

It wasn't long before Bulma returned with more medication. She rushed over to his bedside, setting the supplies on the table. She picked up a syringe, expertly prepping the injection and readying herself to administer it.

With practiced ease, she attached the syringe to the IV line and pushed the medication through into his system.

Once again, Goku noticed the diluted burn, but tried not to react to it.

After a few tense moments, his breathing seemed to even out a bit, his muscles relaxing.

Bulma let out a sigh of relief, but she knew by now that it was just a momentary reprieve, not a cure.

She sat down on the edge of the bed again, gently placing a hand gently on his forehead. His skin was still cold, clammy. He was far from being out of the woods just yet. She knew she couldn't wait. And now that Goku seemed to be a little calmer thanks to the medication, Bulma decided it was the right time to talk to him.

"I wanted to let you know that I've been doing some research," she began, her voice gentle. "And I have a suspicion about what's going on with you. But I need you to confirm something for me first."

Goku's eyes fluttered open, his gaze meeting hers. He seemed to struggle to process her words, the medication working to numb his pain but also affecting his mental clarity. Despite the exhaustion however, he nodded marginally. "What is it?"

Bulma took a deep breath, her eyes not leaving Goku's face. "...Is there... someone you have feelings for, somebody... special to you?"

Goku's eyes widened a fraction, a hint of blush spreading across his cheeks.

"M...Maybe…" he muttered, looking away from her. "Why does it matter?"

Bulma was almost surprised that he didn't deny it. Maybe her father was onto something after all?"

"Because..." Bulma pressed on, her voice gentle but firm. "Based on what I've learned, the symptoms you're experiencing… It's pointing towards something called Hanahaki Disease. Have you ever heard of it before?"

"...Uh-uh, no, I don't think so… What's that…?" he asked, his voice hoarse with a mix of fear and curiosity.

Bulma continued gently, not wanting to scare him anymore than she already probably had. "...It's a rare condition... It occurs when someone has strong, unrequited feelings for another person. And if those feelings are left unrequited... The body starts to attack itself, filling the lungs with flowers that eventually, if not treated, will suffocate the host."

She saw the realization slowly dawn on Goku's face, his eyes widening in horror. "Y-you're saying..." he stuttered. "I have... these flowers inside me... because I... have feelings for someone? I don't understand. How is something like that possible?"

"I know it sounds unbelievable," Bulma sympathized. "But that's what the symptoms are pointing to. And if what they say is true, the only way to stop the disease from progressing… is either for those feelings to be reciprocated and for the other person to return your feelings. Or to get them removed through surgery, which is what I had suggested initially, but… There's something else. If we did go through with surgery, there's a chance that you could lose the memories of the person you're in love with, that caused the disease in the first place."

"Lose my memories? Of the person I'm in love with? But that's…" Goku's heart skipped a beat. The thought was terrifying, almost as terrifying as the disease itself. He couldn't imagine waking up and not remembering who Vegeta was. It was unthinkable. His hands clenched the covers, a visible show of how much the idea upset him.

Bulma noticed the distress in his reaction, placed a hand gently on his arm.

"I know, it's...it's a lot to take in," she said softly. "But I had to tell you the truth. You need to understand what's happening to you. And what options you have."

"I don't want to lose my lung or my memories. But I also don't want to risk losing what we have either… There has to be some other way." Goku retorted, coughing.

Bulma wanted to agree, but based on what she'd read, those were the only two solutions. Surgery or the feelings being reciprocated.

"I wish there was," she admitted, her expression somber. "But so far, those are the only two options I know of. I'm sorry, Goku."

"So it can't… go away then?" He asked nervously, as if only to confirm the answer he already knew.

Bulma shook her head slowly, her expression solemn. "Unfortunately, no. Not on its own. That being said, if the love is returned, the flowers should start to recede and disappear. Otherwise, the growths will continue to spread and the symptoms will worsen. Which would lead to asphyxiation and eventually…"

"He'll die, is that it?" It was Vegeta who finished her sentence. He was standing at the door, folding his arms. It seemed crazy, like something out of a fairy tale, but he had no reason to doubt Bulma. It was obvious that she had done her research to come to such a conclusion.

Both Bulma and Goku looked up at his entrance, a flicker of surprise on Bulma's face. She hadn't heard him approach.

But the sight of Vegeta seemed to rouse Goku from his dazed and hopeless state. His eyes widened at the unexpected presence, a new wave of emotion rolling over his features.

"Vegeta," he rasped out, trying to sit up. "You... you're here."

"Where have you been?" Bulma folded her arms with disapproval. "I told you to look after him."

Vegeta shot Bulma a withering glare. "I was training, what else do you think? Besides, the idiot's a grown man, he can take care of himself for a few hours."

His gaze flickered back to Goku, taking in the sight of him, coming to a stop at Goku's bedside. He tried to ignore the tightness in his chest as he looked down at Goku. He looked even worse off than last night. It seemed the disease was already progressing.

"Yeah, he seems like he's taking care of himself just *fine* , doesn't he?" Bulma said sarcastically, gesturing to Goku, who was currently hacking up flowers. "Clearly everything is perfectly normal."

"Shut up..." Vegeta grumbled, his gaze still fixed on Goku. "You said there's only two options to cure him. Either the other party reciprocates his feelings, or he needs a surgery to remove the root. Is that correct?"

Bulma nodded, her expression grim. "Yes, that's right. According to what I've read, anyways."

Vegeta's jaw set in a firm line. Even though they'd discussed it before, the idea of Goku undergoing surgery still didn't sit well with him. Not to mention, the other option sounded like something straight out of a sappy romance movie. But if it meant saving Goku's life…

He turned his attention back to Goku. The other man's coughing fit had subsided, and he was now attempting to catch his breath, his chest heaving with the effort.

Vegeta took a few steps closer, his eyes roaming over Goku's form, taking in the paleness of his skin and the shadows under his eyes, feeling like a knot was twisting in his chest.

"You really messed up this time, didn't you?" He said, his voice quieter than usual.

Goku looked up at him, his eyes wide and filled with the faintest hint of panic. He opened his mouth to speak, but another coughing fit cut him off. It took several long seconds before he could finally speak.

"I didn't..." he choked out, between labored breaths. " I didn't... do this on purpose, y'know…"

"No, you just managed to get yourself cursed by a magical flower disease. Truly impressive, Kakarot," Vegeta said, his voice dripping with sarcasm. He crossed his arms, leaning back against the wall next to the bed.

Goku managed to glare weakly at Vegeta, but the effect was ruined by the way his body was wracked with another coughing fit. He doubled over, his shoulders shaking as he struggled to breathe.

"So who is it?" Vegeta asked bluntly, not making an effort to beat around the bush.

"Who is what...?" Goku mumbled, his voice hoarse from all the coughing.

"Who do you think it is?" Vegeta asked, his eyes narrowing. "The person that you have these 'feelings' for, obviously."

Goku's eyes widened, a flush of color rising to his cheeks. He looked down and bit his lip, his fingers gripping the bed sheets tightly.

"Come on, spit it out, already," Vegeta pressed. He was growing impatient, and the sight of Goku being so flustered only made him more curious.

"I… can't say…" Goku murmured.

"And why the hell not?" In spite of himself, Vegeta started to feel a twinge of curiosity and, more disconcertingly, a bit of jealousy. Who was this person that Goku was so in love with? This person that he was willing to practically kill himself over? The thought sent an unfamiliar and uncomfortable feeling into his stomach.

He tried to push the feeling down, telling himself that it was none of his business. After all, why should he care about who that fool was in love with? It didn't affect him in any way. But the more he tried to ignore it, the more the question nagged at him, the more the jealousy churned in his gut.

Goku kept his gaze lowered, his fingers still clutching the bed sheets. He looked like a child being scolded, and it was so unlike his usual self that Vegeta found it strange.

Goku's gaze averted from him momentarily. There was a long pause, a beat of silence before he finally spoke.

"Because… I'm afraid," he finally confessed, his voice a whispered, shaky confession. "I'm scared that they won't feel the same way as me…"

"Scared?" Vegeta didn't expect that. The word left his mouth as though it was the most ridiculous thing he'd ever heard. "Since when do you ever get scared, Kakarot? Especially about something as silly as a confession of love?"

"It's not just a confession of love..." Goku protested, finally lifting his head and meeting Vegeta's gaze. "It's... more than that. I don't want to lose them… I can't…" he was struggling to find the words to explain it.

In that moment, another fit of coughing racked his body, a reminder of his ever-worsening condition. The flowers in his lung felt like they were tightening around his throat, like he was slowly being choked from the inside out. But the pain in his chest was nothing compared to the pain in his heart.

Vegeta watched as Goku's chest heaved and heaved, his body convulsing as he wrestled with the flowers in his lung, fighting for air. Vegeta clenched his jaw, trying to maintain his usual expression of aloofness. But the sight of Goku in such a state was getting to him, no matter how much he tried to deny it.

After a few moments, the coughing fit subsided, leaving Goku gasping for breath, his body trembling weakly.

Vegeta had to resist the urge to reach out and help him up, to do something to ease his suffering. Instead, he stood there, hands clenched into his arms, feeling powerless in the face of Goku's illness.

"So you're willing to die because you're scared of a little rejection?" He asked bluntly. He kept his face stoic, not wanting to show any signs of worry. He crossed his arms once again and leaned back against the wall, trying to appear nonchalant. "Have you ever considered that there might be a chance they feel the same way about you?"

Goku's eyes widened slightly, his lips parting in surprise, as if he hadn't considered the possibility. But the look quickly faded, replaced by a resigned expression.

"I... I don't know," he murmured. "They're... well, they're not exactly the affectionate type. They've never shown any signs of being interested in me in that way."

"...You're such a goddamn idiot, you know that?" Vegeta snapped, his voice tight with anger. Goku recoiled, taken aback by the vehemence in his tone.

"What...?" Goku said, his voice small.

Vegeta clenched his jaw, his eyes dark and intense. "You're convinced they don't share your feelings, but you're not even willing to consider the possibility that they do. You're so scared to take the risk, to put yourself out there, that you'd rather suffer in silence than even *try*."

"You...you don't understand," Goku choked out, his voice ragged as he fell into another coughing fit. "This person… they don't see me that way. They never will, I—"

All of a sudden, Goku felt the pull of Vegeta's hands on his collar, his body yanked forward against his will. He grunted as he was pulled towards Vegeta, the force of it causing the flowers in his chest to constrict and press against his lungs.

"You don't *know* that," Vegeta snapped, his voice filled with desperation like never before. "You don't *know* how they feel. You don't—"

He broke off, his eyes darting down to Goku's lips, stained with blood and flower petals. The air in the room felt charged with tension, as if a lightning storm had erupted inside.

"...I *do* know... They can't stand me..." Goku pulled back, another coughing fit wracking his body.

"That's bullshit, and you know it." Vegeta snarled, causing Goku to whimper at his tone, edging back in fear. "You're letting your insecurities and fear get in the way. You have no idea how they truly feel, you're just assuming."

Assumption.

Vegeta avoiding him for months.

Barely responding to his texts.

What else was he *supposed* to think?

There's no way Vegeta felt the same way as him.

Half the time he didn't even want to *look* at him.

Goku opened his mouth to respond, but another coughing fit stopped him. As he doubled over, coughing and choking, Vegeta felt a wave of frustration wash over him. He knew he was being harsh, but how else was he supposed to get the message through to him?

Reluctantly, he relaxed his grip on his collar. As much as he wanted to continue his tirade, he found himself feeling more guilty and helpless by the second.

"Just tell me the truth, Kakarot…" He growled, his face softening. "Who is it? Who's the person you claim doesn't love you?"

Goku looked up at Vegeta, his eyes wide and vulnerable, his face flushed from the coughing fit. He opened his mouth to answer, but the words got caught in his throat.

He couldn't say it. He couldn't bring himself to admit the truth, to admit that the person he was in love with was right in front of him, that it was Vegeta he loved.

His breathing hitched, his heart thudding in his chest. He felt like he was pinned in place by the heat of Vegeta's gaze.

"I... I can't," he rasped, his voice barely above a whisper. "I can't… say…"

The look in Goku's eyes made it clear that he wasn't going to say anything, not now at least. Vegeta clenched his jaw, frustration building within him. He couldn't understand why Goku was so stubbornly refusing to reveal the person he was in love with.

Vegeta's nostrils flared, his eyes narrowing. "Tch. Again with that? What are you so afraid of? You're willing to die for this person, but you can't even speak their name? Stop being a coward!"

Bulma, who had been silently observing the exchange, had heard enough. She stepped forward, fury etched on her face.

"That's enough, Vegeta!" She said, her voice sharp and firm. "You're being too harsh on him…"

Vegeta's eyes flashed in her direction, a low growl escaping his throat.

"You stay out of this, woman," he snapped. "This doesn't concern you!"

Bulma's eyes widened in surprise, before narrowing in anger. "The hell it doesn't! Goku's my friend and I'm not going to sit here and watch you tear him apart like this."

Vegeta flinched at her tone, but refused to back down. "I'm not trying to tear him apart, but he needs to hear the truth. He needs to face the reality that he's letting his own fear stop him from doing something that could save his life."

"And you think yelling at him and calling him names is going to help?" Bulma shot back, her eyes narrowing. "Do you really think that's going to make him more likely to confess his feelings, or are you just making it worse?"

Vegeta gritted his teeth, his jaw clenching in annoyance. He knew Bulma had a point, but he was too stubborn to admit it.

Vegeta gritted his teeth, a look of irritation on his face.

"I'm just trying to make him see what a goddamned idiot he's being," he grumbled. "If he doesn't do something, he's going to die!"

Bulma opened her mouth to say something else, but before she could say anything, Goku's voice came, soft and small, from the bed.

"Stop it..." Goku pleaded, his voice barely above a whisper. "Stop arguing... both of you..."

When he saw the tears in Goku's eyes, Vegeta gritted his teeth, helplessly. He knew he had been too impatient. But he had never been good at showing his emotions, at dealing with vulnerable situations.

He took a step forward, hesitating for a moment before speaking.

"...Kakarot," he said, his voice softer now. "*Please* … Why can't you just say who it is, already? You can't just let this disease kill you because you're afraid to speak up. You... at least have to *try*... "

Goku's eyes darted between Vegeta and Bulma, a mixture of fear and hesitation on his face.

"No, I can't…" Goku struggled to speak, remaining stubborn. "You wouldn't understand…"

"...Then *help* us understand…" Vegeta urged as gently as possible.

Goku looked down, avoiding Vegeta's gaze like the plague as he fidgeted with the fabric of his gown. A blush tinged his cheeks and his heart was hammering in his chest. "These

feelings... They aren't… normal... It's... another guy. Guys aren't supposed to like other guys…"

That revelation hit Vegeta like a ton of bricks. He didn't know what he was expecting, but it certainly wasn't that. He stared at Goku, his brain struggling to process the information.

"So it's a man," he echoed, his voice strained. "A... a man that you're in love with…"

Vegeta's mind was reeling with this new information. In all the time he had known Goku, he had never considered the possibility of him not being straight.

He couldn't deny the pang of jealousy that twisted in his stomach, at the thought of Goku loving another man that wasn't him. After everything they'd been through together, what other man could Goku have possibly fallen in love with?

He scolded himself, trying to push those thoughts aside. He couldn't afford to think about his own feelings now. Not when he was literally dying from an illness that depended on Goku's feelings being returned.

"Do... I know him?" Vegeta forced himself to ask, keeping his tone neutral, as if he were simply curious and not in the middle of a raging storm of emotions.

Goku fidgeted with the edge of his gown once more, his cheeks flushing a deep red. He could only nod, not meeting Vegeta's gaze.

Vegeta's heart constricted painfully. So it was someone he knew, someone he likely had to see every day. The thought of it made his stomach churn with jealousy. Who could it be? Who could Goku be in love with, to the point of it killing him?

"A-Ah... Then... This guy... Who is he?" he asked, his voice a little more strained than before. He needed to know who it was. He needed to put a name to this faceless, nameless man who was slowly stealing away the person he loved the most.

Goku fidgeted in the bed again, unable to bring himself to look up. He felt as though he was being interrogated, with Vegeta's intense gaze burning into him. He didn't want to reveal the name, didn't want to see the disappointment or disgust on Vegeta's face upon hearing it.

"Kakarot," Vegeta said, his voice firm but not unkind. "Look at me."

Goku finally lifted his gaze, the anguish and pain showing clearly in his eyes. He looked like a wounded animal, stuck between the choice of revealing the truth or continuing to suffer in silence.

Vegeta swallowed hard, steeling himself for the revelation. He had to know, no matter how much it might hurt. "Now tell me who it is."

"We're not going to get mad at you." Bulma added, gently. "We just need to know… So we can help you."

Goku's eyes filled with fresh tears, his lips trembling as he choked on a sob. A mixture of fear and shame warred within his heart, the confession on the tip of his tongue. Goku's heart felt like it was tearing itself apart, the truth burning inside of him like an inferno. He wanted so badly to confess his love for Vegeta, to tell him everything, to take the chance and see if Vegeta reciprocated.

But the fear of rejection, of losing him, of watching Vegeta pull away from him, stopped him.

His heart ached and his chest felt tight, the flowers in his lungs squeezing and constricting as though they were trying to suffocate him. The more he fought against revealing the truth, the worse the flowers became, their thorns scraping against the sensitive flesh inside him, causing him to cough and gasp for air.

His eyes once again met Bulma's, panicked and desperate, but he saw her own fear mirrored in her face. Even Vegeta. They both knew he was running out of time.

As Vegeta watched Goku struggle with his confession, his heart sank. He could see the conflict and pain etched on Goku's face, the way his body was wracked with coughs and tremors.

The realization that a simple confession could save Goku's life seemed so simple, so obvious. And yet Goku was too afraid to speak up, too scared to take the risk and face the possibility of rejection.

Vegeta clenched his fists, his stomach doing a flip. He wanted so badly to reach out and shake Goku, to yell at him that whatever was holding him back wasn't worth dying over.

But instead, he held himself back. He knew he couldn't force Goku to confess, no matter how much he wanted to. He had to let Goku come to his own decision. And yet he could hardly bear seeing Goku in such agony, struggling to breathe and fighting against the very flowers that were killing him.

"Damn it..." he cursed, feeling at a loss.

But that's when his thoughts turned to the Dragon Balls, the legendary wish-granting artifacts that had changed their lives in the past.

He looked over at Bulma, his voice stern. "The… the Dragon Radar... Where is it?"

Bulma nodded, her eyes wide with worry. "It's in my lab," she confirmed, already heading towards the door. "I'll go get it, but-"

She was about to protest, to tell him that Shenron might not be able to cure this illness, but Vegeta cut her off, his voice sharp.

"Just go!" he snapped, his gaze shifting back to Goku, who was now clutching against a pillow, coughing violently.

Bulma nodded again, her face etched with worry. She knew there was no talking Vegeta out of this plan, not when Goku's life was on the line. She left the room, the door closing softly behind her as she hurried off to retrieve the Dragon Radar.

Vegeta returned his focus to Goku. He moved closer, sitting on the edge of the bed.

The sight of Goku's fragile state pushed him into action. He moved quickly, pulling Goku into a tight embrace. He held him close, his chest rising and falling rapidly.

Goku's eyes widened in response, his hack lessening almost immediately, a blush forming on his cheeks. "What are you-"

Vegeta grumbled, his voice rough. "Shut up. You said you feel better when I hold you, right? Well, I'm holding you now."

Goku's face flushed even redder, but he didn't protest. He leaned into Vegeta's embrace, burying his face against his chest, the heat of his skin calming the tremors in his body.

He could feel Vegeta's heart beating against his cheek, a strong and steady rhythm. It soothed him, grounding him and taking his mind off the pain and the fear for a moment.

"We're going to fix this, okay? We're going to make you better." Vegeta buried his face in Goku's hair, his own heart thudding desperately in his chest. He had never been good at showing his emotions, had always hidden them behind a veneer of cold indifference. But holding Goku like this felt like baring his soul.

He could feel Goku's body shaking in his arms, the coughs racking his frame weakening him with each gasp. The reality of the situation hit him hard - that this illness was killing the person he loved.

"So just... just hold on," he muttered, his voice thick with panic. "Bulma's getting the Dragon Radar. We're going to wish for whatever we need to cure this."

Goku nodded against his chest, his arms lifting to cling onto him in response. He knew he couldn't hold on much longer. He could feel his strength leaving him, the grip of the disease slowly sapping the life out of him.

But slowly, ever so slightly, the frequency of the coughs lessened, and Goku's eyes fluttered shut, his muscles relaxing as he melted into Vegeta's embrace. Vegeta's touch was like a lifeline. The one thing keeping him alive.

"Vegeta..." he mumbled weakly, his hand lifting to grip the fabric of the other Saiyan's shirt.

Vegeta pulled Goku even closer, his arms encasing him like a protective shield. The way Goku said his name, so soft and vulnerable, tore him apart from the inside. He continued to hold Goku against him, feeling the other Saiyan's body shaking against his chest. "Shh… Don't talk, just save your strength for now. I've got you."

"Alright… I've got it." Bulma reentered the room, the Dragon Radar clutched tightly in her hand. She paused slightly at the sight of Vegeta and Goku, their intimate embrace like a shock to her system.

Without loosening his grip, Vegeta looked up at Bulma, his expression set in a grim determination. The sight of the Dragon Radar seemed to energize him, giving him a renewed hope.

"Good," he said, his voice gravelly. "Give it to me."

Once Bulma handed it to him, Vegeta held the Dragon Radar in one hand, his other hand still wrapped around Goku's trembling body. He activated the device, his eyes scanning the screen.

He then took a moment to calibrate it before pulling away from Goku and laying him back against the pillows. "Stay here. I'll be back as soon as I can."

Goku opened his eyes as he felt Vegeta pull away, a small sound of protest escaping his lips. He reached out and clawed into Vegeta's shirt. "Wait… Don't leave me here… The pain... I can't…"

Vegeta's heart clenched at Goku's pleading, the panic in his voice sending a wave of dread through him. He watched as Goku suddenly convulsed, more bloody flowers spilling from his mouth, the sight a stark and terrible warning.

He gently removed Goku's grasping fingers from his shirt, gently pushing him back down onto the bed, his voice gruff but not unkind.

"Damn it, Kakarot. I have to get the Dragon Balls," he gritted out, his voice tight. "You'll just have to handle it until I get back. Besides, you've endured worse, right?"

"I...I know," Goku rasped. "But...it hurts…so much... please… Take me with you…"

"What? Absolutely not." Vegeta cursed, his patience wearing thin. "I need to fly fast and get the Dragon Balls as quickly as possible. You'll just slow me down."

Goku's face contorted into a dejected pout, the expression familiar and heart-wrenching at once.

"...I don't care," he insisted, his voice strained but defiant. "I wanna go with you. You can carry me… Pretty please…? With a cherry on top?"

Vegeta let out an exasperated huff, his irritation flaring once more. Dealing with Goku's stubbornness was a pain in the ass under normal circumstances, but when he was hanging on

by a thread? It was maddening.

But in the end, Goku would have his way, as he always did.

"Fine," he gritted out, his voice edged with annoyance, handing him the dragon radar. "I'll take you with me. But if you slow me down, I'm leaving you behind."

With a swift and careful movement, Vegeta scooped Goku up into his arms, swaddling him in a blanket to maintain his modesty.

Goku's heart skipped a beat, his heart fluttering at how quickly Vegeta had conceded to his demand. But the pain and exhaustion overpowered any feelings of victory. He let out a soft groan as he was lifted into Vegeta's arms, the movement jostling his body slightly.

But being pressed against Vegeta's chest, wrapped in the blanket, felt like a small slice of relief. He nuzzled his face against Vegeta, closing his eyes and taking in a shaky breath.

Vegeta felt Goku's body against his, the heat of his skin and the slight tremors wracking his frame. He tightened his grip around him, ensuring he was secure in his arms.

"This is going to be a rough ride," he warned, his voice stern. "Hold onto me and don't let go, no matter what."

He then shot a glare at Bulma, his expression a mix of urgency and resignation. "I'll be back as fast as I can."

Bulma nodded, her face betraying her worry. "Be careful, both of you," she said, her voice tight. "And... bring Goku back in one piece, okay?"

Vegeta grunted in acknowledgement, already heading towards the window.

"That's the plan," he muttered, the words feeling heavy on his tongue. He opened it and with a powerful leap, he flew out into the open sky, carrying Goku with him.

It wasn't until the two Saiyans were already gone that the possibility dawned on Bulma.

The fact that Vegeta seemed to make Goku's illness more manageable.

That Goku always seemed to relax around him.

She thought it was just his energy influencing the growth of the flowers, but then he had said he was in love with another guy.

...There's no way…

Could Goku be in love with Vegeta?

If her suspicions were correct, Bulma could only hope he'd realize it before it was too late.

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END CHAPTER 8

Chapter 9

Story: A Heart's Bloom Chapter 9

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As they flew through the air, Goku leaned heavily against Vegeta's chest, the effort of the journey taking a toll on his already weakened body. Each sudden movement seemed to send fresh waves of pain through him, so he clutched at Vegeta's shirt, trying to stifle the coughs that threatened to overtake him, only barely numbed by a mixture of Vegeta's touch and the medication that was still in his system.

Vegeta, meanwhile, moved as quickly and efficiently as he could, his heart thundering with a mix of fear and urgency. Every second counted, he knew he couldn't afford to waste any time. As the dragon radar signaled their proximity to the first Dragon Ball, he landed in a large, open field. It was a place fairly untouched by humans, the tall blades of grass rustling as the wind blew through them.

The Dragon Radar led him to a small, rocky hill at the far edge of the field. His eyes scanned the ground for any signs of the orb. "According to the radar, the first one should be somewhere around here."

"Over there... I see it..." Goku pointed to a small crevice, the orb's orange surface glowing softly in the shade.

"Oh, good..." His heart thudding with relief, Vegeta reached into the crevice and plucked it from its hiding place. "Here, hold onto this for me."

As Goku took it from him, Vegeta soared back into the air and towards their next destination. The journey was quiet, the only sounds coming from the rushing air and Goku's ragged breathing.

After about thirty minutes of flight, they finally neared the second location indicated by the Dragon Radar. Vegeta began to descend towards the dense, remote forest below. The tall trees and thick foliage provided an eerie and almost ominous atmosphere, the sounds of wildlife echoing throughout the area and the shadows cast by the trees leaving their surroundings dimly lit.

Vegeta grunted as he landed in the middle of the forest, leaves and sticks crunching underneath his feet. He cradled Goku against him, his grip on him firm as he looked around the area, searching for any signs of danger. The trees were tall and thickly packed together, creating shadows that seemed to dance and shift in the dim light. It was then that something caught his eye. High in a tree, glimmering faintly in the shade, sat the four-star Dragon Ball, resting against a forked branch.

Up there...!

Upon spotting the Dragon Ball, Vegeta made haste in flying upwards towards the tree.

The tree's branches and leaves whipped past him as he ascended, his eyes fixed on the Dragon Ball. Once they were close enough, Goku reached out, curling his fingers around the smooth orb, its surface cool to the touch.

"It's the four star dragon ball. It's my grandpa's ball..." He murmured, as he took it to hold with a gentle smile.

Vegeta paused at Goku's words, his eyebrow raising. "Your grandfather's?" he repeated, curiosity flickering in his eyes. It was rare for Goku to bring up his family and past.

"It was a long time ago." Goku replied vaguely. "This is the ball he kept… so back when he died, I used to think his soul was trapped inside of it…"

Vegeta's eyes softened at the confession, a strange feeling of understanding washing over him. He didn't say anything, just watched as Goku held the Dragon Ball, the old memories clearly bringing up some strong emotions.

What a strange thing to believe… But given his nature, I guess it's not exactly surprising…

For a moment, their eyes met, and Vegeta felt a sudden fluttering in his chest. He squashed the feeling with a stern shake of his head, refocusing his attention on the task at hand.

Not much more was said for a while as they continued their hunt. The next three Dragon Balls were found easily but the journey itself was taxing, not just physically, but mentally too. Vegeta was used to pushing himself to his limits, but carrying Goku while searching for the damned orbs was taking a toll on him.

After two hours, he found himself in a region enveloped by a harsh snowfall. The air was bitterly cold, the wind howling angrily as it ruthlessly tossed around snowflakes.

In the end, Vegeta had no choice but to landed in a clearing, shielded slightly from the worst of the storm by a line of tall pines.

He growled in frustration, looking around in the near-whiteout conditions, as he tried to make out the screen of the dragon radar. "Damn it... I can't see anything in this blizzard… And I think it's messing with the signals… We'll have to wait this out."

He turned, looking for any form of shelter. There, in the distance, he spotted a cave, a small, dark spot against the snowy landscape. "Over there. Let's take cover in there."

Clutching Goku tightly in his arms, he headed towards the cave, the wind and snow stinging his face. It was a tight squeeze to get through the narrow entrance, but once they were inside, the temperature difference was immediate.

The cave was small and dark, not much to it, just cold, hard stone walls. Vegeta set Goku down against a wall, checking him over for any sign of further decline and making sure the blanket was wrapped tightly around him, especially considering he was only wearing a nightgown.

He has to be freezing... Maybe I should have changed him into something before we left. Well, too late now...

Once he was sure Goku was as comfortable as he could be, Vegeta moved closer to the cave entrance, peering out into the blizzard-filled landscape. The storm showed no signs of ceasing, the snowfall thick and relentless. A growl of frustration rumbled from his chest, his irritation growing with each passing moment. The situation was far from ideal. They were stuck in a cold, dark cave, with a snow storm raging outside and the Dragon Radar's signal disrupted to the point of being useless. They had no choice but to wait, and the waiting was grating on his nerves.

He shifted his gaze back to Goku, his eyes narrowing as he observed him. The other Saiyan was shivering, the nightgown and blanket only offering so much much protection against the chill. He moved back towards him, sitting down next to him against the cave wall.

"Are you alright?" he asked gruffly, his eyes flickering over the other Saiyan's face, the worry gnawing at him refusing to abate.

Goku nodded weakly, his head slumping against the cold stone wall. "M'fine... Just tired…"

He closed his eyes, another coughing fit wracking his body, more petals falling from his lips like bloody snow.

Vegeta frowned at the sight, wrapping his arm around him. It was an instinctual act, yet a reaction he wasn't used to, but he couldn't pull away. He gently rubbed Goku's arm in a soothing motion, as Goku cuddled further into the blankets and closer to him.

The closeness and the silence brought a different kind of tension in the air. Vegeta was hyper-aware of Goku's body so close to his, of every movement of his form as he continued to shake, but despite the situation, he found himself relishing the moment, the closeness unfamiliar yet strangely comforting. It somehow felt right, natural, to have Goku there, against him, their bodies fitting together like pieces of a puzzle.

Goku hummed in response, his mind clouded with exhaustion as he cuddled further into the blanket, and closer to Vegeta. The weight of the other Saiyan's arm around him and the solid support of his body were comforting, if not a welcome distraction from his suffering.

But as Vegeta continued to hold Goku, his own mind was tormented by the reality of their situation. They weren't here by choice, they were here because of the damn disease, and every moment wasted was a moment closer to Goku's possible demise.

Without thinking, his hand reached up, gently brushing away another strand of hair that had fallen onto Goku's forehead.

As his fingers grazed the soft skin, the thought that was lingering in his head finally slipped out, his voice laced with frustration. "Damn it… I don't understand why you won't just tell me the truth... If I knew who you were in love with, then maybe he could help you…"

Hearing those words come out of his own mouth hurt, probably more than it should have. The idea that another man could do for Goku what he himself *couldn't* left him feeling helpless... But, no matter how much he wanted to keep him to himself, he knew he couldn't push his luck over some stupid jealousy. Saving Goku's life was far too important to him for that. As long as he survived, that's all that mattered to him in the end.

Goku opened his eyes slightly, his gaze unfocused and tired. There was a hint of fear in his eyes, mixed with a tinge of resignation. He fidgeted a little under Vegeta's arm as he battled with his feelings. He was afraid of confessing his love to Vegeta, afraid of how the other Saiyan would react. But in spite of that, his body leaned shamelessly into Vegeta's touch, drawn to his warmth like a moth to a flame.

Vegeta's eyes narrowed, noticing the way Goku moved closer, seeking more contact. It was a small action, almost imperceptible, but Vegeta was keenly aware of every movement, every breath. He clenched his jaw, his mind a whirlwind of thoughts, struggling to understand what Goku was feeling. It frustrated him, being kept in the dark like this.

Goku trembled slightly, his body still seeking more of Vegeta's warmth. He closed his eyes again, his voice a soft whisper, barely heard above the howling storm outside. "I'm just... scared… I'm afraid you'll... laugh at me... or hate me for it… I don't want to... lose you.”

The admission was raw and honest, a testament to the depth of Goku's feelings. Vegeta cursed under his breath, frustration for the other Saiyan overwhelming him.

"Idiot…" he muttered, his voice shaky. "As if I'd ever hate you over some stupid love confession... Look, the truth is I..." He was silent for a moment, his jaw clenching as he battled with his own emotions. He glanced at Goku, at the way he was leaning into him, so fragile, and the words were suddenly on the tip of his tongue, but he swallowed them down. "*care* about you, okay...? More than I should… and I don't want you to die…"

Goku was quiet for a moment, as he considered his words with a dejected expression. "...Last I checked, you'd been avoiding me…"

Vegeta scowled, the words hitting a nerve. He *had* been avoiding Goku, or at least trying to minimize their interactions, ever since these complicated feelings had started to rise within him. But how do you explain that you've been avoiding someone because you're afraid of how much you love them? He took a few moments to gather his thoughts, his voice coming out rougher than he intended.

"That's… I don't know," he admitted, his gaze shifting to the side. "It's... complicated. But that doesn't change the fact that I don't... hate you."

Goku seemed to accept that answer, or maybe he was too weak to argue anymore. He just hummed again, his eyes downcast as he played with Vegeta's shirt. "Then why...? Why *have* you been avoiding me? Have I done something to make you mad at me?"

"I… it's not that you did anything wrong," Vegeta rasped out, his voice tight. He could lie again, as he always did, and tell him it was just training or something, but the lie would taste bitter in his mouth, and Goku probably wouldn't believe him anyways. He gritted his teeth before answering. "I just… need some space, is all. I've got a lot on my mind right now, and being near you… it's confusing."

Confusing...?

Goku looked up at him. "But you and I *always* used to train together…"

Vegeta's mind was in chaos. How could he explain the whirlwind of emotions he'd been feeling without revealing too much? He tried to keep his tone neutral, but his voice betrayed a hint of anguish.

"I know we *used* to, but it's… different now," he growled out reluctantly. "It's not just about training. It's *everything* . I can't concentrate when you're around. You... you're too distracting."

Goku's expression changed at that, confusion and hurt flashing across his features.

"Me? What did *I* do?" he asked in a soft voice, searching Vegeta's face for answers.

Vegeta turned his head to the side, unable to meet Goku's gaze.

"Y-You just *are* ," he muttered. "You're always there, looking at me, talking to me... it's like you're *everywhere*. And I can't stop... *thinking* about you."

Despite feeling weak and ill, Goku managed to crack a weak smile, a hint of his usual mischief in his eyes. "You're… thinking about me? That's gotta be a first."

"Shut up. You're one to talk, coughing up flowers for somebody like some kind of romantic fool." Vegeta averted his gaze, his cheeks flushing slightly at the playful tone. If only Goku knew what he had meant by thinking about him, but the idiot seemed as oblivious as ever and Vegeta was in no rush to push it.

Goku chuckled lightly, the sound quickly turning into a cough. He hunched over, his chest rattling as he wheezed. Once it subsided, he looked up, his eyes meeting Vegeta's. A strange tension hung between them, the atmosphere charged with a thousand unsaid things.

They stared at each other, the silence between them filled with an undercurrent of tension. A thousand thoughts ran through Vegeta's mind - should he say something? Should he tell him the truth after all? No, it would be selfish.

"So who is it?" He finally managed the courage to ask again, his voice weaker than usual.

Goku's expression sobered at Vegeta's question. He fidgeted a bit, his eyes shifting away for a split second before looking back at Vegeta. There was a flicker of vulnerability in his gaze, a hint of fear that the other saiyan wouldn't understand.

"You... promise you won't laugh at me?" he asked, his voice uncharacteristically hesitant, as he fidgeted with the edge of his blanket.

Vegeta's eyes widened ever so slightly at the intense question. He shifted, his hand brushing against Goku's hair.

"...Fine, I promise, okay?" he grumbled, his heart feeling strangely heavy. "Now spill, before I change my mind."

Goku's eyes fluttered shut at the touch of Vegeta's hand in his hair, his body instinctively leaning into the contact. It was an unconscious reaction, a sign of how much he loved and trusted Vegeta's touch.

He took a moment to gather his thoughts, his mind swirling with the enormity of what he was about to reveal. But he needed to say it, needed to get the weight of it off his chest, even if it meant his heart was in danger. "...It's... you."

Vegeta froze, his hand still in Goku's hair. His eyes widened, his mind struggling to process the words that just left Goku's lips.

"M... Me?" he repeated, his voice hoarse with disbelief as he was certain he must have misheard. "You're in love... with *me* ?"

The world seemed to come to a standstill as the revelation hit him like a ton of bricks. He stared at Goku, his mind reeling from the shock.

Goku's face flushed with embarrassment, a mixture of relief and anxiety coursing through him. He looked up at Vegeta, his eyes wide and earnest.

"Y-yeah," he murmured, his voice barely louder than a whisper. He fidgeted with the edge of the blanket again, his body feeling oddly vulnerable under Vegeta's gaze. "I have been for a while now."

Vegeta's thoughts whirled in his head, his heart racing in his chest, the confession from Goku crashing over him like a wave.

"...You're such a fool..." he finally managed to murmur, the insult sounding weak even to his own ears. Despite the harsh words, he didn't remove his hand from Goku's hair, his fingers still gently tangled in the soft locks. "Out of all the people in the universe... *I'm* the one you fall in love with...? What's wrong with you...?"

Goku looked away, his eyes downcast.

"I don't know," he mumbled, a hint of sadness in his voice. "But I can't help it... I've tried, believe me. But every time I looked at you, every time I was near you... I just… loved you more and more… I'm sorry. Please don't be mad at me…"

His eyes grew glassy, the tears finally spilling over. He was interrupted by another painful coughing fit, more petals staining the blanket a bright crimson hue.

Vegeta panicked at the sight of Goku's tears. It was too much. All his years of training, all his strength, and yet the sight of Goku crying left him completely disoriented.

"H-Hey…" he muttered, the words softer than he intended. He gripped Goku's shoulder, his eyes fixed on the petals scattered on the blanket. "Stop crying, it's… fine…"

He found himself moving, shifting so that he could pull Goku closer against him, his arms wrapping tightly around the other's trembling frame. "Look, you don't need to apologize for something like this, okay? You really think I'd be *mad* at you for falling in love with me?"

"You're *not*... ?" Goku sniffled with uncertainty.

"No, idiot," Vegeta muttered, his tone softer than he wanted. "I'm not mad."

He gently wiped away a tear from Goku's cheek, his hand lingering there for a moment longer than necessary. "I'm just... trying to process all of this..."

The realization that Goku loved him back, that the feelings he'd been trying to deny for so long weren't one-sided, was still sinking in. His mind grappled with the implications. He'd always been in denial about how much Goku meant to him, how deep his own feelings ran. Now he had to face them, confront them. He couldn't just ignore this anymore. Couldn't keep pushing away the warm, fuzzy feelings that damn near threatened to consume him everytime he was near the other Saiyan.

"Are you... going to reject me?" Goku closed his eyes again, his body still shaking, as he buried his face against Vegeta once more.

"I-I never said that... Don't put words in my mouth..." Vegeta protested, blushing.

Goku's eyes widened at Vegeta's outburst, surprise and confusion flashing across his face. He blinked, staring at the other saiyan for a moment, completely thrown off.

Vegeta grumbled under his breath, realizing he had overreacted, his own words ringing in his ears.

"I mean... I…" He huffed, his face growing even warmer. "It's not... it's not that simple, okay?"

He shifted awkwardly, struggling to find the right words. His usual eloquence and arrogance were gone now, replaced by a rare vulnerability. He didn't know how to deal with this situation, didn't know how to express his own feelings in the face of Goku's raw admission of love.

He wanted to tell him the truth, wanted to admit that he had been feeling the same way, that he was terrified of losing him. But what was he supposed to say? How could he put into words the maelstrom in his mind, his heart?

After a moment of silence, he forced himself to respond, his voice a low rumble.

"What I'm trying to say is that… I'm not... happy about it," he managed to muster, his words sounding weak and unconvincing even to himself.

Goku's face fell at the words, his eyes growing dimmer. His expression grew downcast, accepting the statement as rejection, as he had been expecting. But before he could pull away, Vegeta spoke again, his voice cracking ever so slightly. "But I can't... deny that I… feel… *something*... for you."

Goku froze, his breath hitching in his throat. He stared at Vegeta, searching his face for any hint of deception. But all he found was a mixture of reluctance and tenderness in the usual guarded gaze.

"You... you do?" he whispered, his body going rigid. "And you're... not just saying that to make me feel better, right?"

"Do I look like the kind of person who just says things for no reason?" Vegeta retorted with irritation. "I wouldn’t be talking about this if I didn't mean it."

Goku's eyes widened at the unexpected confession. He had braced himself for rejection, had prepared himself to accept whatever reply Vegeta might give. But this, hearing that the other Saiyan returned his feelings in some way, was too much for his already fragile state to process.

"Damn it, don't just stare at me. Say something already!" Vegeta hissed, a hint of a plea creeping in.

Goku jerked at the tone, his mind slowly starting to process what Vegeta had said. A mixture of disbelief, relief, and lingering pain filled his heart.

"S-sorry, it's just..." He began, his voice still shaky, "I don't understand... Why didn't you say anything before? Why wait until now?"

Like he was one to talk. But the whole reason he himself had waited so long was because Vegeta had acted like he wanted nothing to do with him.

Vegeta's expression hardened at the question, the hand in Goku's hair stilling for a moment.

"You think it was easy for me to admit this?" He huffed, his own vulnerability hidden behind gruffness. "I wasn't exactly thrilled about having these feelings, you know. It was just... inconvenient."

Goku couldn't help but feel hurt by Vegeta's words. He had confessed his feelings, laid himself bare, and all the other Saiyan could say was it was inconvenient?

His gaze fell.

"Inconvenient? So what, you're just tolerating this because I'm dying?" he asked, his voice flat and cold.

Vegeta growled at the tone, frustration replacing any hint of vulnerability from before.

"Damn it, I told you to stop putting words in my mouth," he retorted. "That's not what I meant."

"Then what *did* you mean?" Goku challenged, the hurt still evident in his voice. "If it's so inconvenient to be near me, then why don't you just—"

He was cut off by another coughing fit, his body jerking as he struggled to breathe. The sudden pain made the anger in his words fade away, replaced again by vulnerability.

"H-hey… Be careful…" Vegeta watched, the annoyance fading as well as he once again brushed a hand over his back. Why the hell was this so complicated?

Goku tried to catch his breath, the pain in his chest slowly ebbing. He leaned into his touch, despite his earlier anger.

"I just... don't understand you sometimes, Vegeta..." he mumbled, his voice hoarse.

"You think I understand myself any better?" Vegeta huffed. "This whole situation is... confusing as hell."

He paused, his gaze fixed on Goku's face. He hated seeing the other Saiyan in pain, but he hated how much the sight affected him even more. It made him feel weak, exposed.

"And I'm not... good at dealing with emotional stuff," he admitted, the words almost pained. "Especially when it comes to you."

Goku was surprised at first, but then his expression softened.

"You don't have to be... good at it," he said in a quiet voice, his body still shaking from the coughing fit, he looked up at him with desperation in his eyes. "Just... don't push me away anymore. Please..."

At hearing the pleading tone and seeing the look in his eyes, Vegeta felt like a dam had broken within him. He suddenly couldn't take it anymore.

Without thinking, he acted. He cupped Goku's face in one of his hands, pulling him closer. His lips crashed against the other Saiyan's, rough and demanding. It wasn't exactly a gentle kiss, more fueled by overwhelming emotion than finesse, but he couldn't hold back any more. He had never been the type to show affection through gentle gestures anyway.

Goku was startled by the sudden, rough kiss, but he quickly gave in, his body responding automatically to Vegeta's touch. One hand tangled into the other Saiyan's hair, pulling him closer, and the other clung onto his shoulder, as if to steady himself.

The kiss was far from perfect. It was messy, filled with pent-up emotions and desperation, but it was real and raw. It was exactly what they needed.

Vegeta deepened the kiss, his tongue demanding entry into Goku's mouth. His hands moved, holding onto the other Saiyan's waist, trying to pull him even closer, his fingers digging into the fabric of his night gown.

Goku moaned into the kiss, the sound strangled and needy, his body arching involuntarily against Vegeta's. The pain in his chest faded into the background, replaced by a heat that seemed to consume them both.

His hands reached up to grip at Vegeta's shirt, holding onto him like a lifeline. The contact was intense, fueled by months of pent-up desire and denial. Neither one of them wanted to break it, even as they both gasped for air, their breaths coming in short, ragged pants.

It was Vegeta who pulled away first, reluctantly breaking the kiss. He was breathing hard, his heart pounding against his chest. He took in Goku's expression, the other saiyan looking up at him with half-lidded eyes, his lips slightly parted and swollen from the kiss.

"How are you feeling...?" he asked, his voice raspier than usual. "Any better?"

Despite how much he wanted to continue, Goku's condition was top priority. He needed to know.

"Yeah. A little, but..." Goku confessed, his voice sounding a bit hoarse. As if on cue, however, another coughing fit hit him, his body shuddering with the force of it.

Vegeta frowned, his grip on Goku's hip tightening in concern. The coughs didn't seem as severe as before, but they were still there.

"Why are you still coughing?" he asked, his eyes narrowing. "I reciprocated your feelings, so you should be getting better."

Goku looked up at him, his expression sheepish.

"I... I don't know," he admitted, his lips trembling a little. "Maybe it's not... Hanahaki disease, after all...?"

Vegeta's irritation flared up at Goku's words. The possibility of the illness being something other than Hanahaki wasn't something he wanted to play around with.

"Well, we're certainly not going to find out by staying here all day. Come on. We have to keep going… We need to find the last two Dragon Balls and fast. It looks like the snow storm has died down some too so we should be safe for the time being." He said, his voice firmer now, full of determination. Making sure Goku's blanket was securely wrapped around him, he picked him up as Goku grabbed the dragon balls.

Goku's body ached with a mixture of physical pain and disappointment, but he nodded weakly. He knew that Vegeta was right; time was running out. So he resigned himself to silence, focusing on trying to control his breathing. They had come this far. There was no giving up now.

Vegeta trudged out of the cave, Goku still in his arms, and scanned the landscape. The mountains were still covered in an unforgiving blanket of snow, but it fortunately seemed to have calmed down some, enough for him to see more clearly than before.

"I'll check the radar…" Goku murmured, pulling it out and switching it on, the device beeping to life in his hand. The small screen lit up as the device picked up a signal, a yellow dot blinking on the display.

"There." Goku murmured, showing the screen to Vegeta. "The Dragon Ball's signal is that way, west-northwest."

Vegeta studied the display for a moment, taking note of the direction before nodding in acknowledgment.

"Alright," he said gruffly, "Hang on tight."

He shifted his grip on Goku, ensuring a secure hold before launching himself into the air with a burst of speed. The snow and wind whipped around them, but Vegeta navigated through it with practiced ease, keeping a steady flight towards the destination indicated by the radar.

Soon enough, a tall outcropping of rocks came into view, nestled against the side of a mountain. Vegeta landed at the base of the rocks and scanned the area, assessing the situation. The terrain was rugged and treacherous, the rocks steep and slick with snow. For a normal human, it would be a death wish. But Vegeta wasn't a human. He was a Saiyan.

So, despite the extra weight in his arms, he navigated the difficult terrain with minimal effort. Upon reaching the center of the outcropping, he finally spotted the Dragon Ball. It was

lodged deep into a small crevice, buried beneath layers of ice and snow.

"That's it." With a quick glance to ensure his hold on Goku was secure, he reached out with one hand, clearing off some of the snow to grip onto the cold, smooth surface of the orb. It was a bit of a struggle to pull it loose, but after a moment of effort, it came free, popping out of the crevice and into his palm.

Goku weakly reached out and took it into his arms, to make it easier for Vegeta to carry him. Vegeta nodded, adjusting his hold on Goku to accommodate the additional object. "One more Dragon Ball. We're almost there."

Goku didn't reply. His voice had grown too hoarse, and his body aching with a constant, throbbing pain. What little relief he had gotten before through kissing Vegeta was long since forgotten. But he swallowed the pain down, putting all the energy he had left into keeping hold of the Dragon Balls.

They continued their journey, the snow-covered landscape passing under them as Vegeta flew. He occasionally glanced down at Goku, worry flickering in his gaze at the sight of his strained and pale face.

But he didn't comment on it, didn't show his concern. He focused on their mission, pushing through the harsh weather.

He turned his attention to the Dragon Radar, scrutinizing the display and calculating the distance and direction they needed to go.

"We're getting closer," he grunted, his arm wrapping tighter around Goku as he mentally prepared for the flight. "It's northeast of here, roughly two hundred miles. It shouldn't take too long to get there. Just stay with me."

Two hundred miles wasn't a very long distance by flying standards, but the situation made it feel like a journey of a thousand miles.

The wind rushed past them, cutting through the air like a knife, as Vegeta pushed himself to fly faster. He could feel Goku shivering in his arms, the cold of the air adding to the other's discomfort.

He pushed his body to its limits, flying as fast as he could without risking dropping Goku. The cold air bit at his skin, but the adrenaline coursing through his veins kept him from feeling the cold.

The landscape below them began to shift again, hills and rock formations giving way to a vast, open plain, scattered with rocks and small bushes. The temperature was much warmer here, making the going easier. But time itself seemed to stretch on forever, minutes blending into each other as he flew, the landscape beneath them a blur. But then, in the distance, he spotted their goal - a flash of orange, nestled in some rocks.

Vegeta breathed a sigh of relief as the Dragon Ball came into view. They were so close. He began to descend, his speed slowing down as he targeted the exact spot where the Dragon Ball was located. He landed gently, his feet touching the ground with a soft thump.

He eased Goku down, carefully leaning him against a stone. He wrapped him tighter in the blanket and made sure he was secure before letting go.

Vegeta moved closer to the Dragon Ball, his body tense and alert. He didn't waste any time, reaching out to grip onto it. The ball came loose easily, and Vegeta palmed it in his hand with satisfaction. This was it. They finally had all of them.

Without wasting another beat, he swiftly turned around, carrying the seventh and last of the Dragon Balls back to where Goku was.

Goku looked up at him as he approached, his face pale and gaunt. Despite the pain, there was a glimmer of relief in his eyes as he saw the last Dragon Ball clutched firmly in Vegeta's hand.

He managed a smile, his voice a hoarse whisper. "We got them all…"

"Yeah, we did." Vegeta dropped down beside him, his eyes roaming over his form, taking in the paleness and the shivers. He wanted to say something, to offer some comfort, but the words were stuck in his throat. Instead, he found himself asking the same thing he had before. "How are you feeling?"

Goku's eyes cracked open, his gaze drifting over to Vegeta through the haze of pain. "Not… so good… My arms are numb… And so is the side of my face… I think I'm about to… die…"

He tried to speak further, but another coughing fit overtook him instead, his body shaking with the force of it.

"Hey, don't say that…" Vegeta's grip tightened around Goku's hand involuntarily, panic consuming him. "Listen, I'm going to summon Shenron and we're going to get you fixed. But I need you you hang on for me, okay...?"

Goku was silent for a moment, his breaths coming out in small, uneven gasps. Finally, he raised his head, his eyes locking onto Vegeta's. "Okay..., I... trust you,"

His voice was barely audible, but the conviction behind the words was clear.

Vegeta felt a lump form in his throat, hearing those words. He knew what they meant. They weren't just about the current situation, they were a declaration of the faith Goku had in him, a sign of the bond they had forged over the years. Without even thinking, only guided by the raw emotion that surged through him, Vegeta leaned in and gently touched his lips to Goku's.

The kiss was softer this time, brief, but filled with all the emotions he didn't know how to express with words alone. When he pulled away, his gaze was intense, his voice strained. "You don't get to die, you understand me...?"

Goku's eyelids fluttered open again, his face slack with surprise at the unexpected show of affection, but then his lips curled into a small, weary smile. It was a shadow of his usual

sunny grin, but it was sincere, and affectionate.

"Heh," he whispered, his voice filled with a weak humor. "I... I didn't know you could be... so sentimental. It's… kinda cute…"

"Sh-Shut up… Romantic fool…" Vegeta muttered, his cheeks heating up as he tried to mask his true feelings with a familiar scowl. But it was all for show, a desperate attempt to hold onto his usual brusque persona in the face of his own vulnerability. He stood up abruptly, turning his back to Goku as he clutched the Dragon Balls tightly. "Look, just... Focus on staying alive until I make the wish…"

The words coming out more like a command than a request. But Goku chuckled weakly, the sound soft and raspy. Despite his condition, he could see right through Vegeta's attempt to hide his emotions this time. But he didn't tease him about it, instead just continued to watch him with a small, affectionate smile on his face.

Vegeta busied himself arranging the Dragon balls into a tight cluster, anything to distract from the emotions rolling through him. But his hands trembled slightly, betraying his inner turmoil, even as he tried to appear composed. He felt exposed, vulnerable in this moment. But there was a small part of him that didn't mind. Because it was with Goku.

"Eternal dragon," he called out, his voice steady despite the flutter of emotions in his chest. "By your name, I summon you forth, Shenron!"

As he spoke, the seven Dragon Balls began to glow with a soft, steady pulse, the clear blue sky around them soon becoming replaced by a dark, cloudy backdrop. The air felt charged, electric, as the power of the Dragon Balls reached a fever pitch. A bright light flared up from them, growing larger and larger until it formed a beam that shot up into the sky.

As the light dissipated, the Dragon Shenron emerged, his massive form materializing in the clearing. He coiled in the air for a moment, his scales glistening in the dim light, before he spoke, his voice deep and booming, like the rumble of thunder.

"I am Shenron," he began, his serpentine form undulating slowly, "I will grant you any wish. Now speak."

Vegeta swallowed, his eyes sweeping over the large form of the dragon, his heart drumming in his chest. This was it. The moment they'd been waiting for. He had one chance, one wish to possibly change everything. He took a deep breath, preparing himself.

"I... I wish for Kakarot to be healed," he said, his voice firm and steady despite the flutter in his chest. "I wish for the disease in his body to be eradicated, and for his health to be fully restored. I wish for him to be back to his normal state - strong and healthy."

He could feel Goku's eyes on him, watching him, but he didn't turn to look. He kept his gaze fixed on Shenron, trying not to show the desperation he felt. He needed this to work. It *had* to work.

Shenron's eyes narrowed, his massive form shifting as he responded.

"Your wish is not as simple to fulfill as you believe," he rumbled, his voice echoing across the clearing. "The disease afflicting the one you call Kakarot is not a physical ailment. It is a disease of the heart, a condition born of unrequited love. Such ailments cannot be undone by my power alone."

Vegeta felt a shot of disbelief and frustration go through him. He stepped forward, his hands clenched into fists.

"*Unrequited love*?" he demanded, his voice sharp and edged with anger. "But I did exactly as I was supposed to. I confessed to him. I even *kissed* him. How is that not reciprocated?"

Shenron's gaze didn't waver.

"Your actions were the first step," he replied, his voice deep and rumbling. "But for a disease such as this, mere words and a single kiss are not enough. The love you seek to heal must be

consummated. Only then can the disease be eradicated. Only then can he be healed."

Vegeta felt like the ground had been yanked out from under him.

"Consummated?" he repeated, his voice a hoarse whisper. He knew what that implied, but he couldn't believe it. He had to question it, had to be sure. "What do you mean by that?"

"The love must be consummated," Shenron repeated. "It must be expressed not just in words or actions, but in body as well. Only when the love is made physically real, its purity and intensity manifested in flesh, can the disease be cured."

"But... but that's... You can't be serious," Vegeta barely managed to sputter, his voice a hoarse whisper. "You're really suggesting that I… We…"

He nervously stumbled over his words, his mind racing as he tried to process the dragon's words. It wasn't just a matter of confessing again or even kissing. It was about going further, about expressing their love physically. It was a step he hadn't considered, a step he hadn't thought necessary.

He glanced at Goku, who was watching him with confusion and curiosity. The other Saiyan didn't seem to understand what Shenron was implying.

All of a sudden, uncertainty consumed him. Was he ready to take this step? Was he ready to go that far? The thought both thrilled and terrified him at the same time. He looked back at Shenron, his voice gruff. "Are you sure that's the only way?"

"No, there is one other possibility," he said, his voice a deep rumble. "I can extract the source of the disease, tearing it out completely. However, doing so would also erase all memory of you from his mind. It is of great sacrifice and such a decision is one that he alone must make."

The dragon's words echoed in Vegeta's head, leaving him with two difficult choices: to make a *physical declaration of his love* , or to erase himself completely from Goku's memory.

"Wait..." Goku suddenly spoke up, his voice weak and trembling but with a hint of determination. "I don't really understand what's going on, but you're saying you can... get rid of the flowers inside of me, but... I'll forget all about him?"

"Correct," Shenron replied, his tone neutral. "If the source of the disease is extracted, all memory of your time with him will be removed."

"No," Goku said, his voice barely above a whisper. "No, I don't want that. Bulma suggested the same thing earlier, but… I can't forget him."

Vegeta turned to Goku, seeing the fierce determination in the other Saiyan's eyes, the refusal to give up their connection. It made his chest ache, both with the fear of what was at stake and the deep, overwhelming love he felt.

Shenron's gaze rested heavily on Vegeta for a moment before he spoke again.

"It appears," he said slowly, "that there is only one path available to you. You know what must be done."

Vegeta felt the weight of those words, the finality in them. He knew what Shenron was implying, he knew there wasn't any other choice. He could feel Goku's eyes on him, the other's trust and faith weighing on him like the dragon's gaze.

He glanced at Goku once more, his heart pounding in his chest, before turning back to Shenron.

"Alright," he sighed, his words filled with a newfound determination. "I'll do it."

Shenron nodded, his massive form shifting in approval.

"Good," he rumbled. "You must remember though, it is the purity and intensity of the love that will cure the disease, not the act itself. The love must be made real, but it must also be sincere and true. Do you understand?"

Vegeta took a deep breath, his heart racing. He understood. It wasn't just about the act itself, it was about the feelings behind it too. The love had to be pure and true, otherwise it wouldn't work.

"I understand," he replied, his voice steady. "But, about my wish, could you... At least heal his body...? I know you said you can't cure him, but surely you could at least repair some of the damage that's been done to his lungs?"

Shenron considered the request for a moment, his giant eyes narrowing as he looked down at Goku. After a moment, he spoke.

"That is a simple task." he agreed.

Vegeta felt a small wave of relief at the dragon's agreement.

"However," Shenron added. "While I am capable of healing the damage done to his lungs thus far, it will do nothing to combat the disease itself."

"I know." Vegeta nodded his agreement to the terms, never more grateful when he saw the change in Goku. The color was returning to his face, his breathing growing less shallow. Once Goku had stabilized, Shenron shifted his gaze to Vegeta once more.

"And what is your second wish?" the dragon asked, his voice a deep rumble that echoed across the clearing.

"Second wish, huh? Oh, right, I almost forgot…" Vegeta paused, his eyes flicking over to Goku, who was watching him intently, waiting for his answer. He had thought about this moment, about what he would wish for if given the chance. There was so many possibilities - power, riches, even immortality.

But all of that paled in comparison to what he already had.

"I don't know... Just save it for next time..." he said finally, his voice firm.

Shenron didn't seem too surprised by Vegeta's response, simply nodding and accepting this decision.

"Understood," he said. "I will save your second wish for the next time we meet. Now I must go. May you find what you seek.

Vegeta watched as Shenron faded away, disappearing in a flash of light after which the dragon balls once again spread out into different directions.

He waited until the Eternal Dragon's form had vanished completely, the sky returning to normal. The clearing was once again quiet and still and the balls were sent flying in various different directions.

He then turned to Goku, who was sitting up now, looking a lot better than he had a moment before. His face had regained some color, and his breathing was normal and steady. He was watching Vegeta, a look of confusion on his face.

"Vegeta? What is... Consumm...a...?" Goku struggled with the word.

Vegeta felt a ripple of anxiety go through him. He'd known this question was coming, but it didn't make answering it any easier. He took a deep breath, gathering his thoughts.

"It... it's something we need to do," he began, struggling for the words. "To cure you."

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A/N: END CHAPTER 9

Chapter 10 (Updated As Of November 19th)

Story: A Heart's Bloom, Chapter 10

This chapter has been updated as of November 19th.

I noticed a lot of bad pacing errors, problems with the flow and dialogue problems/things I didn't like with it in general, so I have updated and touched it up/removed some stuff etc, for anybody interested.

I originally had over six different versions of it planned, worked between multiple docs, and at the time of posting and before, I was dealing with some things and I was not in a good headspace to properly proofread it or it would have never been published at that point. This A/N will be taken down at some point, I just wanted to let everybody know! I'm happy at least some people enjoyed it. And if you didn't before, I hope you'll enjoy the updated version. If you still don't, I'm sorry. I'm just not used to writing smut or power bottom Goku at all and quite frankly I feel embarrassed, so sorry guys. 😭

Tbh I'm going through a lot right now, and I don't know if I'm going to be writing again for a while or ever but I did want to get this done because I felt bad leaving this as it was.

And while it turned out a little different than I originally envisioned it, I hope everybody still enjoys it. 🫶🥹

Disclaimer: I don't own DB

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"Vegeta, what is... Consumm...a...?"

When he heard Goku ask that question, Vegeta's cheeks burned, as he steeled himself for the awkward conversation he knew was coming. Even now, he didn't know how to broach the subject.

"It... it's something we need to do," He said, as vaguely as possible. "To cure you."

"Oh, okay…" Goku pondered it, but didn't linger on it for too long.

"Can you stand?" Vegeta held out a hand to him.

"I think so." Goku took it, allowing himself to be pulled up.

As Goku got to his feet, his breathing was still slightly off because of the flowers growing inside of his chest, but he was at least feeling much better than before and, even though he didn't know how long that would last, he had no desire to complain.

Vegeta acknowledged him with a grunt and urged him to come with him. "Follow me. We need to find some place more private."

"Private? What for?" Goku tilted his head. "Where are we going?"

"You'll see..." Vegeta replied, a flutter of nerves in his stomach.

After a moment, followed by Goku, he flew into the air, scanning the surroundings for a place that would offer privacy, his mind racing.

Finally, he spotted what he was looking for - a secluded cave not too far off. It was discreet and remote, just what they needed.

"Over there." He wasted no time in heading towards it, his heart rate increasing the closer he got. Upon reaching the entrance, Vegeta ducked under the low hanging branches and led Goku inside.

The cave was dimly lit, the light seeping through the entrance providing just enough illumination for the two Saiyans to see each other. The space wasn't much, just a small, rocky chamber, but it was private, which was what mattered.

Once inside, Goku had started to unwrap himself from the blanket, which caught on the IV that was still attached to his arm.

"I should probably take this thing off." Goku began to pick at the tape, catching Vegeta's attention.

"Hey, don't touch that. That's…" Vegeta murmured, as Goku ripped off the tape, yet couldn't bring himself to do much to stop him from removing it.

"I'll be fine, don't worry… I just need to stop the bleeding." Goku pulled out the IV and tossed it aside. He then grabbed the edge of his gown, pressing it against the wound until the bleeding had died down some.

Vegeta wanted to tell him he was being careless, but he also knew Goku was unlikely to listen. The other Saiyan had always been like this - stubbornly independent and careless with his own health. He let out a huff, his eyes flickering down to the gown Goku was holding to his arm.

Something about seeing him like this awakened some deep protective instinct in Vegeta, despite the fact that he knew Goku could take care of himself. It was irrational but he couldn't help it.

"So what did you want to tell me anyways?" Goku didn't look up, seeming more focused on drying up the blood.

Vegeta's heart skipped a beat at the question. He had been so focused on Goku's wound that he'd almost forgotten why he had brought him here. He swallowed hard, trying to steel himself for the conversation they were about to have.

"...Kakarot..." He finally began once the bleeding seemed to have died down, breaking the silence.

"Hm?" Goku blinked, gazing up.

Vegeta swallowed. "There's something... We need to do… and I need you to listen to me, okay?"

"Yeah, sure." Goku tilted his head. "I don't really understand what's goin' on, but…"

He trailed off as he tried to make out Vegeta's facial expression.

Vegeta took another steadying breath, his heart racing in his chest. God, he didn't even know where to begin.

"What Shenron said…" He finally spoke, the words like gravel in his mouth. "About your illness... and the only way to cure it…"

"Well," He took another deep breath, his heart pounding painfully in his chest. He found himself hyper aware of Goku's eyes on him as he continued. "We have to…"

Vegeta took a deep breath, gathering his courage. He had to be direct. "...have to..."

Goku furrowed his brow at the sudden stuttering and lack of an answer. He had never seen Vegeta struggle with his words like this before, it was completely unlike him.

"We have to do... what?" He asked, trying to catch Vegeta's gaze, which seemed to be flitting about everywhere except at him.

Vegeta swallowed, his mouth dry. Gods, why was this so hard? He should just spit it out - tell him bluntly what needed to be done. But there was something stopping him - some small voice that told him to be gentler with Goku, despite everything.

After a moment, he finally spoke up again, his voice soft yet firm.

"It's... Look, what consummate means is to… Damn it all…" His words trailed off again, frustration welling up in him. He was a prince, a warrior, and he was struggling to find the words to tell the person he cared about most that they needed to have sex to cure his illness. It was laughable at best and humiliating at worst. Vegeta looked down, his face burning like never before. Finally, after a few more failed attempts, Vegeta mustered up his last scrap of courage, something coming out in a low, almost shameful whisper. "We have to… have…"

Goku stared at him blankly for a moment, as if he hadn't heard him. "Hold on. What did you just say? I couldn't hear you."

Vegeta internally groaned. Frustration boiled under the surface, at himself for not being able to get the words out; and at Goku, who seemed hellbent on making him repeat it.

At the end of the day, he wasn't built for beating around the bush, so he didn't.

"...For fucks sake. It's *sex* , you moron. The cure for your disease is sex! With the person you love." Vegeta's face flared with heat. There. The word had finally left his lips. It was out in the open now, no going back. He held his breath, waiting for a reaction, any reaction, from the other Saiyan. His heart was pounding so hard he thought it might burst out of his chest.

And of course he could have handled that better. Why was he so awkward? There was no way Goku would-

"Oh! *Sex* ." Goku scratched the back of his head and giggled nervously, catching Vegeta off guard. "You could have just said so sooner."

Vegeta stared at him, a mixture of bewilderment and relief washing over him.

"...Aren't you... bothered by it? I mean it's…" He couldn't hide the surprise in his voice. He'd been expecting some kind of shock, but certainly not this casual acceptance.

Goku shrugged, a small grin on his face. "What? Of course not. I trust you, Vegeta. So if Shenron says this is the only way, then I'm onboard. Truth is… I've actually wanted to do this with you for a while now… Unless you don't want to…? I know physical contact isn't really your thing, so…"

Vegeta face was burning, the realization that Goku had wanted this as well making his heart jump in his chest. Despite how he usually felt about physical affection, this was with Goku, the person he loved. And the fact that Goku trusted him, that he was so casual about this, it was… He took a few shaky breaths, trying to calm his racing heart and flushed cheeks.

"You idiot... Of course I'm... okay with it..." He looked down, avoiding his gaze. "...Why else would I have brought you here...?"

"Just makin' sure." Goku beamed, moving closer. In an uncharacteristically forward move, he reached out and cupped the side of Vegeta's face with his hand, gentle yet firm.

Feeling both shocked and weirdly soothed by the unexpected caress, Vegeta instinctively leaned into the touch, his heart starting to pound again.

"You're cute when you're blushing, ya know that?" Goku said with a cheeky grin, his thumb running over his cheek.

"Shut up..." Vegeta tried to scowl, but he was too flustered to do so properly.

Goku grinned, his own heart racing now with excitement and anticipation. He took a step closer, so they were practically pressed together. The gown he was wearing didn't leave much to the imagination.

He swallowed hard, reaching out to place a tentative hand on Goku's hip, his fingers gripping the fabric of the gown. The realization of what they were about to do was both exciting and nerve-wracking, but he also couldn't deny the growing desire inside of him.

"Just relax, okay?" Goku murmured, his voice low and soothing. "We'll take it slow."

With that, he leaned in and captured Vegeta's lips in a soft kiss.

Despite his embarrassment, Vegeta melted into the kiss immediately. His arms moved up of their own accord, wrapping around Goku's waist, desperate for more contact.

The kiss deepened, their mouths molding together, the only noise in the cave being their ragged breathing. Goku's hand moved from Vegeta's cheek to the back of his head, fingers tangling into his hair.

Vegeta's brain was spinning, his mind overtaken by desire and the overwhelming sensation of Goku's mouth against his. He was so lost in the kiss, in the feeling of Goku's body pressed against his, that he nearly forgot why they were here in the first place.

Finally, they broke apart, both a little breathless. Goku's cheeks were rosy now, his eyes darkened with lust. Vegeta stared at him for a moment, taking in his disheveled appearance, his heart thudding wildly.

Without breaking eye-contact, Goku moved to the ground, settling himself on the blanket that was laying there. The gown he was wearing rode up, giving Vegeta an eyeful of bare thighs and stomach.

"Come here." He patted the space beside him, his voice low.

Despite the lump in his throat, Vegeta obliged, making his way to the spot next to Goku. he tried to maintain some semblance of composure, but he was well aware of how flushed and breathless he looked.

Goku reached out and grabbed his arm, pulling him down. Vegeta stumbled slightly, but managed to catch himself before falling completely on top of the other Saiyan. He ended up hovering over Goku, a knee between his thighs, his hands on either side of his waist.

"Loosen up a little, would ya? You're too nervous..." Goku laughed gently, his thumb tracing a path over his jaw.

"I'm not nervous!" Vegeta retorted, the heat flaring in his cheeks again. Even as he said it, his heart continued to race. He forced himself to take a breath, trying to steady himself. "I just... I want to do this right."

Goku smiled, his eyes crinkling with affection. "You don't have to worry about that. Just stop thinking so much and do what feels natural, okay?"

Yeah, sure, easier said than done… Vegeta thought it over, his eyes trailing down Goku's form, drinking in every contour and dip. He swallowed hard, his mind racing and his body tingling with desire.

Recognizing the look on Vegeta's face, Goku's hand moved down to play with Vegeta's tank top, grateful he wasn't wearing his uniform for once. "You always overthink things."

Vegeta huffed, but he knew it was true. His mind was constantly racing with thoughts, strategizing and planning. He couldn't help it. But he tried to push those thoughts away as he focused on Goku.

Goku's hand slipped under his top, sliding over his abdomen. His grip was firm but gentle at the same time, and Vegeta's skin tingled at the contact, his stomach tightening under the touch.

"Look, how about this..." Goku's hand continued to roam, moving higher, his fingers tracing over Vegeta's chest able to sense the other Saiyan's growing arousal in response. "Why don't you relax and let me take lead for a bit?"

His fingers skimmed just under the waistband of Vegeta's trousers, teasing. He looked back up at Vegeta for approval. "Can I?"

Vegeta felt like he was on fire. He swallowed hard, his throat suddenly dry, and then gave a shaky nod. "F… Fine... Do whatever you want..." He managed to stutter out, his voice embarrassingly shaky.

Goku giggled a bit, clearly amused but with no malice behind it. He then they started pulling them down.

Vegeta's heart was in his throat, his thudding with anticipation. He had to admit, being controlled like this by someone he trusted so completely was weirdly exciting.

Goku's hand still playing with Vegeta's trousers, he watched Vegeta's reactions carefully. He saw the way his breath hitched. It was arousing and a little amusing how undone Vegeta was, a side of him that he rarely got to see.

When he'd pushed his trousers down far enough, he let go, his hand moving to rest on Vegeta's hip instead. He leaned in and placed a soft, lingering kiss on his neck.

The kiss made Vegeta shiver, and he felt strangely powerless, letting Goku take the lead like this, but it was also thrilling.

His eyes closed momentarily, trying desperately to focus on his breathing, to maintain some semblance of composure.

Goku's hand moved from his hip to his inner thigh, his fingers tracing light, circular patterns on his skin.

"You're so reactive," He murmured against Vegeta's neck, his teeth gently nipping at the flesh there. "I like it."

Vegeta's mind was starting to go a little fuzzy. Goku's hand, the light bites on his neck... It was making it difficult to think, let alone speak.

"I told you to shut up," He managed to gasp out, sounding more breathless than he would've liked. "Of course I'm... reactive... when you're doing... that…"

Keeping his shirt pulled up, Goku continued his exploration, his kisses tracing a path down his inner thigh.

Vegeta clenched at the blanket beneath them, trying to ground himself as Goku's mouth moved lower and lower. His breath was coming in short gasps, his face impossibly red now.

When Goku's mouth reached the waistband of his boxers, he froze, his mind going blank for a moment. It was like being hit by a surge of electricity, the anticipation building exponentially.

Goku looked up, his eyes meeting Vegeta's. The look on his face was almost feral, yet somehow soft at same time, and it made his heart skip a beat.

Vegeta's body was taut as he waited for the inevitable. His chest was rising and falling rapidly, his hands still gripping the blanket.

Desire pooled in Goku's gut, as he watched closely, looking for any sign of protest or discomfort. He saw neither, just a mixture of eagerness and nervousness on Vegeta's face.

Finally, he tugged on them, the elastic giving way easily. Vegeta gasped softly as his arousal was freed from its confines, the cool air of the cave a stark contrast to the heat building between them.

Goku's hand wrapped around his length, his touch light but firm. Vegeta's head fell back, his breath catching in his throat. It was all he could do to keep himself from bucking his hips forward, seeking more friction.

The other Saiyan grinned slyly. "You alright? You're being awfully quiet."

Vegeta swallowed hard, his voice coming out strained. "Stop... stop talking…"

Goku chuckled lowly, his hand slowly beginning to move. "Why? I'm just trying to make sure you're enjoying this."

Vegeta's eyes fluttered shut as a wave of pleasure washed over him. "I'd enjoy it more if you... stopped talking…"

"Someone's bossy." Goku sped up his movements a little, his thumb rubbing over the tip, mixing with precum.

Vegeta's stomach muscles clenched, his breath coming out in short gasps. His mind was dazed and fuzzy, every touch sending a jolt of electricity through him. He knew he was being too clingy, too desperate, but he couldn't help himself. He wanted more.

Goku's hand was working him over diligently, his grip and speed just right. Vegeta was biting his lip now, trying to remain quiet but failing, sounds continuing to break free from his throat.

When Goku's mouth suddenly replaced his hand, a strangled noise escaped Vegeta as his hips jerked forward. The wet heat of his tongue was overwhelming, and Vegeta groaned, his hand moving to grip the back of Goku's head.

His hand threaded through Goku's hair, his fingers gripping the silky locks. He couldn't keep himself still anymore, gently rocking up into his mouth.

Moans of pleasure escaped his lips, his thoughts completely blinded by desire.

Goku's tongue was working him over, swirling and coaxing in a way that made Vegeta's head spin. His free hand was now gripping Vegeta's hip, holding him down as he took him in further.

Every nerve ending was on fire, his body coiling up like it was about to snap. Vegeta's hand in Goku's hair tightened, his breath coming in harsh pants.

"Fuck..." He couldn't stop the word, couldn't keep his voice steady, the coil inside him winding tighter and tighter.

"Kak..." His voice was a hoarse whisper, broken and needy. "Kaka...rot…"

Words failed him, replaced by the gasps that kept escaping his lips, each one getting louder and more desperate than the last.

The pressure was building, the sensation almost overwhelming. He knew he couldn't hold on much longer, and he knew Goku could tell too.

Goku finally pulled back, his lips red and face flushed. He looked slightly smug, clearly pleased with the state he'd managed to reduce Vegeta to. But there was something else in his eyes as well, a need that matched Vegeta's own.

The room was silent for a moment, except for the sound of their breathing, before Goku spoke. "You ready for more...?"

Vegeta could only nod, his brain too scrambled to form a coherent sentence. He watched as Goku pushed himself up on his knees, moving to straddle his hips. The gown he was wearing rode up, exposing an expanse of a lighter complexion that deeply contrasted with Vegeta's tan.

Goku leaned down, his lips finding Vegeta's in a searing kiss. It was messy and desperate, both of them too far gone for finesse.

Vegeta's hands began roaming, tracing the lines of Goku's hip bones. He was suddenly impatient, needing to be closer to him, needing more.

He pulled his mouth away, his lips moving down to Goku's neck, biting and sucking on the soft flesh. The action seemed to spur Goku on, his hands moving to rest on Vegeta's shoulders, gripping firmly as he rocked himself against him.

Vegeta could sense the other Saiyan's arousal, the heat making him ache. He broke away from the kiss, leaning back slightly to look up at Goku.

"Take off your clothes..." The words came out more like a command than a request.

"Okay." Goku gave a small nod, his movements slightly clumsy as he sat up a little. He pulled his gown over his head in one swift movement, revealing his bare upper body. His boxers were still between them, the thick material doing little to hide his own need.

Vegeta's eyes roamed over the skin, taking in the sight of the other Saiyan above him. He traced the lines of his chest, exploring the expanse of his torso. His body clenched in anticipation, the need growing stronger with every passing moment.

His hand moved down, pressing against the bulge in Goku's boxers. He could feel Goku twitch at the contact, the reaction sending a thrill through him.

"Vegeta..." Goku's voice was low, a hint of pleading in the single word. The sound of his name broke through the haze of arousal in Vegeta's mind, and he focused his attention back on Goku. He knew what he had to do, what they both needed.

He withdrew his hand, moving it to his lips instead. Without breaking eye-contact, he licked his fingers, the action deliberate and dirty. Goku's eyes darkened at the sight, his breath catching in his throat.

Vegeta's hand moved back down, his fingers slipping under the edge of Goku's boxers. He rolled them down, just enough to give him access to where he needed to be.

He paused for a moment, his breath ragged and shallow, before finally reaching for Goku. He found his opening, his fingertips tracing around the entrance, just teasing. His other hand came up to rest on the inside of Goku's thigh.

Goku gasped, his body jerking slightly. He leaned forward, holding himself up against Vegeta's shoulders. "Quit... quit teasin' me… Hurry up already…"

Vegeta smirked, enjoying the little display of impatience. But he didn't want to keep either of them waiting for much longer. With a firm but gentle touch, he pushed a finger inside. Goku gasped again, his fingers digging into Vegeta's shoulders.

After a few minutes, another finger joined the first, and Goku bit down on his lip, holding back a moan. His eyes closed, his whole body trembling in Vegeta's arms.

The sight of Goku like this, lost in pleasure and need, sent a wave of heat through Vegeta's gut. He moved his fingers slowly, stretching and preparing.

"Damn it... you're... You're takin' too long..." Goku's voice was strained, his words punctuated by gasps. Goku's impatience was growing with every motion, his need for release becoming almost unbearable. He leaned forward, bracing himself against Vegeta's chest, his thighs trembling.

He shifted his position, straddling his lap, and then reached down between their bodies.

"Kakarot..." Vegeta watched as Goku's hand disappeared between them, his breath catching in his throat. He had a pretty good idea of what he was going to do, and the thought made his stomach clench.

A moment later, Goku groaned loudly, the sound breaking the silence of the cave. Goku's hand was moving, his fingers working inside of himself.

God… He's… really…

Vegeta's eyes couldn't tear away from the sight before him, Goku's movements, the flush on his face, the way he was biting his lip... It was almost too much for him.

When Goku's hand finally withdrew, his dilated eyes fluttered open, locking with Vegeta's. He gave a jerky nod, a silent indication of what he wanted.

Vegeta didn't need any further encouragement. Holding him steady, he lined himself up, his own breath ragged in his throat.

"Veg... Vegeta..." Goku clawed at his chest, gasping for air. There were no more words, just the low, guttural moan from the larger Saiyan as he lowered himself down.

"Fuck... you're... so tight..." Vegeta's eyes rolled back, his mind going fuzzy. Every thought was a struggle, every bit of attention focused on the overwhelming sensation of being inside him. After a moment, he slowly began to roll his hips up while holding Goku in place.

Goku's lips parted, a soft gasp escaping his lips as he let himself sink down further, taking more of Vegeta in. His whole body shuddered, his breath coming in soft pants.

"Mm.." His head was tipped back, his eyes squeezed shut, his gasps coming faster as he rode him. Vegeta's fingers were leaving bruises on him, he was sure, but he couldn't care less.

The space was filled with the sounds of their ragged breaths, the occasional soft moan or gasps, the slick sounds of flesh against flesh. It was a heady mix, setting Vegeta's heart ablaze.

He tightened his grip tightened on him, the need to take over becoming stronger with every passing moment.

And, as if picking up on Vegeta's thoughts, Goku lifted his head, his eyes locking with Vegeta's for a moment. There was a fire in his gaze, a hint of challenge, as if daring Vegeta to hold back.

His pace picked up, making Vegeta bite back a moan.

Still, Vegeta kept moving with him, meeting his every movement.

It was hard to hold back, hard to keep up, but he was managing. His eyes were glued to Goku's face, taking in every flushed muscle, every twitch of his lips, every sound he made.

"G-God... I can't believe how amazin' this feels... Aah... H-Harder... Please, I need more..." His voice was hoarse and rough, almost a low whine, as he continued to meet Vegeta's thrusts.

"Harder, huh...?" Vegeta's voice was a low, gruff whisper, and he couldn't deny that he loved the way Goku was reacting, the way he was begging for more. "You really want me that

badly?"

"You have no idea..." Goku gasped out, his head tilting back as he rocked his thighs against Vegeta. "I need you… I wanna feel you with every part of me... Deeper, harder, take me completely... and make me yours in every possible way... To become one with you... I've wanted it for so long now... So please... Don't hold back..."

Vegeta's breath hitched. The raw desire and need in the other Saiyan's voice sent a shiver down his spine. It was almost too much, too intense. He knew his self-control was slipping.

"Dammit, Kakarot… You're... you're going to be the death of me…" he mumbled, his voice coming out in a rough, ragged gasp. His hands moved to grip Goku's hips a little tighter, holding him in place as he started to move faster against him. "How's this...?"

He knew Goku could take it, knew he could handle a rougher pace, but he needed to make sure he wasn't pushing him too far too quickly.

His hands ran up Goku's sides, taking in the softness of the gown under his fingers. He wanted it off, he wanted to see all of him, but he made no move to remove it.

Goku gasped at the change in pace, pulling on Vegeta's arms. "Aah... Y-Yes…! Just like that… Keep going… Harder…! Don't stop…"

His voice was growing more desperate and urgent, his hands digging into Vegeta's shoulders, his nails leaving red marks in their wake, his eyes squeezed shut. He couldn't get enough, he needed more, always more when it came to Vegeta.

Goku's pace was becoming frantic, frenzied, and it was sending Vegeta rapidly towards the edge. He was struggling to hold back, to keep his own needs under control.

"Kakarot… Wait… Slow down..." His gasped out the words, the plea rough and desperate. "I... Aahh... If you keep going like that, I'm... I'm not gonna last… I said… to slow down…!"

Vegeta's voice strained with the effort of holding back, the heat in his gut threatening to consume him completely.

Goku didn't seem to hear him, or if he did, he didn't care. His hands had moved back to Vegeta's chest, clawing into his flesh like he couldn't get close enough. He didn't know how much longer he could take this, how much longer he could hold onto his composure. His mind was in a fog, his thoughts scattered.

A low, possessive growl escaped Vegeta's lips as his patience finally reached its limit. He'd had enough of trying to restrain himself, enough of trying to hold back for Goku's sake.

Without hesitation, Vegeta suddenly flipped their positions again, rolling them over so he was on top of him. He held Goku down with his weight, pinning his wrists to the ground on either side of his head.

"Damn it..." He grunted, panting and out of breath. "Fuck... You're driving me crazy, you know that?"

He leaned down, capturing Goku's lips in a rough, possessive kiss.

Goku was taken off guard by the sudden change in position, but he didn't protest. Instead, he let out a moan against Vegeta's lips, his tongue eagerly slipping into the other Saiyan's mouth, seeking more contact.

Vegeta deepened the kiss, his tongue meeting Goku's in a fierce, fiery dance. His hands were still gripping Goku's wrists, his fingers digging into the smooth flesh.

He was trying to use the kiss to distract them both, to try and cool the fire burning between them, but it seemed to be having the opposite effect. Every move, every touch just seemed to make the flames burn hotter, higher. Vegeta's tongue was exploring Goku's mouth, claiming it, claiming him in every way he could.

"Vegeta," Goku gasped out, his voice ragged and breathless. His body was still trembling, seeking more friction. "Please... I need you so bad…"

"I know.." Vegeta groaned at Goku's words, slamming into him, the friction between them sending waves of pleasure coursing through them both. Their mouths collided again, their kiss becoming more desperate, hungrier. "But if we don't slow down… I won't be able to… hold out anymore..."

It took everything in him to say that, his face flashing red.

"I told you don't… I want you to go as hard as you can on me..." Goku's voice was rough, desperate, and he was moving more fiercely against Vegeta now. "Please, Vegeta... I want... I need to feel *all* of you…."

Vegeta's eyes narrowed at that. He could feel his whole body reacting to the pleading tone, and he couldn't resist it, couldn't hold back when Goku was begging for it like that.

He released Goku's wrists, and shifted his position, his pace suddenly speeding up as he gave in to the overwhelming desire.

He buried his face against Goku's neck, his breath hot and ragged against the other Saiyan's body. Every thrust was met with a gasp, every movement a silent plea for more, more, more. Goku's hands were everywhere, clawing at his shoulders, his back, wherever they could reach, holding him tightly as they moved together. They were both on the brink, riding that fine line between pleasure and pain, the intensity of it all almost too much to bear.

Goku was panting, his whole body shuddering with each thrust. He looked wrecked, his face flushed and eyes glazed, but he was still asking for more. And how could Vegeta deny him when he looked like that?

He kept his pace rough, deep and hard, just what Goku had asked for. Vegeta could feel Goku's body tensed up, tremors running through his limbs. The knowledge that he was the

one causing these reactions, the one making Goku feel this good, it was addictive.

He nuzzled up into Goku's neck, kissing the soft flesh there. "Mn… Keep making those noises… You're so beautiful... So damn perfect…"

Goku's gasps mixed with moans at Vegeta's words, his head tipping back to give Vegeta more access to his neck. He clenched onto his shoulders, arching against him. Being called beautiful, being told he was perfect, it made something primal and possessive flare up inside of him, a deep need to hear more of it, to be praised and claimed.

"Vegeta… I'm…" Goku's words were broken by the needy moans that were escaping his lips. He clawed at Vegeta's back, his nails leaving behind red marks on the other Saiyan's body. His body was taut, on the edge, waiting for the final push that would send him over. Tears began to fall down his cheeks and it was all he could do to cling tighter to Vegeta, drawing blood in his back with his nails. He cried out, his voice a ragged moan against Vegeta's ear, as he choked out a sob. "God… I'm… I can't hold out… anymore…"

Vegeta's pace quickened, his thrusts becoming more urgent, more forceful. Goku's body was tensing, preparing for release, and he knew he himself was close too. The sounds of their labored breaths and moans echoed through the cave, blending together in a rough and rhythmic symphony of pleasure.

"Shh… It's okay…" His hand moved down, passing over the defined muscles of his abs and then, tracing the contours of his body until he reached the spot between his legs. "It's okay, just let it out."

His grip circled Goku's arousal, fingers wrapping around it tightly. He gave an experimental pump, starting slow, and then picking up the pace as Goku gasped and uttered his name.

Every touch, every movement, was sending Goku spiraling. Vegeta's touch, the quickening pace of his thrusts, it was all too much and yet not enough. As Goku felt himself nearing the edge, he could no longer resist the overwhelming sensations. With a gasp, he released one of his hand's grip on Vegeta's shoulders, taking over where Vegeta had left off. He started to stroke himself, the motion in rhythm with Vegeta's thrusts. His head fell back once again as a guttural moan left him, a sound full of desperation.

Vegeta's pace increased, becoming faster and more forceful, driving into Goku with abandon, the sounds of Goku's moaning fueling his own desire. He leaned forward, bracing himself with one hand against the stone wall as he pulled him even closer, driving into him with a rougher and more erratic tempo. His own release was nearing, the tension building in his chest, and he knew Goku was close as well. He could sense the tenseness in his body, the way his breath came in short, ragged gasps.

"Veg... Vegeta..." Goku's voice was hoarse and broken, the words coming out as a strangled gasp. "I'm... I'm gonna.. I-I…"

He couldn't hold on anymore, it was all too much, building and building until it felt like he was going to explode. His body tensed, every muscle taut, waiting for that moment of release.

"Ah... nngh... Vegeta... ah... Ah... Ah!"

The sound of Goku's release echoed around them, filling the air as the other Saiyan convulsed beneath him.

Vegeta couldn't hold on any longer, the sight and sound of Goku falling apart beneath him pushing him over the edge.

"Shit… Kak…Kaka…rot…"

With a strangled moan, he pushed himself as deep into Goku's body as he could. His body shuddered as his own climax hit, a guttural sound escaping his lips. The sound was loud in the quiet of the cave, the sensation of his release filling Goku up even more intense than he'd expected. He could hear the squelch of it as he moved inside of him, the sound both obscene and arousing.

His body trembled with the aftershocks, his breath coming in harsh gasps. He pulled Goku even closer against him, his arms wrapping around the other Saiyan's body, as he rode out the

last waves of his climax.

He leaned down, resting his forehead against Goku's chest, listening to the rapid beat of the other Saiyan's heart that matched the pace of his own. His hands moved in lazy, caressing patterns, tracing the lines and contours of the muscled flesh. The cave was suddenly quiet, the only sound their ragged breathing, the only movement the rise and fall of their chests.

For a long moment, Vegeta let himself bask in his warmth, his face still pressed against Goku's chest.

The heat between them, once so intense, had now softened, leaving only a comfortable, warm afterglow. For a long moment, Vegeta let himself bask in the feeling, his face still pressed against Goku's chest, feeling the steady thump of his heart as it slowed.

Goku laid there, his arm still resting around Vegeta, the aftermath of their climax leaving him shaken and drained. Each breath was labored, each heartbeat a throb in his chest.

He could hear the thump of Vegeta's heartbeat which was in sync with his own. It was a moment of quiet, a pause in the storm of emotions and tension that had built between them. Despite all their banter and arguing, despite their differences and their constant clashes, they fit together so perfectly, like two pieces of a complicated and complex puzzle.

They were spent, their energy depleted, but it felt so damn good.

Goku shifted a little, gazing up at Vegeta. The Saiyan's eyes were closed, his expression surprisingly relaxed. Goku reached up, his fingers gently tracing the lines of Vegeta's face.

"You okay?" he whispered, his voice low and hoarse from all the sounds he'd been making. He wanted to make sure Vegeta was alright, that he hadn't overdone it or gone too far.

Vegeta's eyes fluttered open, those dark orbs meeting Goku's gaze. "I should be asking *you* that, Kakarot. How are you feeling?"

Goku could tell that the other Saiyan was concerned about him, despite his usual gruffness and tough exterior.

"I'm okay," he rasped out, his voice still roughened from the intensity of their lovemaking. "Just a little sore, that's all."

Vegeta's chest vibrated with a low, amused snort. "A little sore? I'd be surprised if you could walk straight for a week after that."

Goku giggled softly, the sound turning into a groan as he tried to shift his position. "Ugh... maybe you're right. I don't think I can feel my legs right now."

He winced a little as he tried to move again, the soreness between his legs a stark reminder of their rough and passionate tryst. "Heh, I guess I'll just have to rely on you to carry me back again."

He didn't bother mentioning he could use Instant transmission. Maybe he was too exhausted to consider it or he didn't mention it on purpose. Just an reason to be held by Vegeta a little longer.

Vegeta let out another snort. "You'd like that, wouldn't you? Me carrying your sorry ass all the way back to capsule corp."

Goku's grin widened. "Yeah, maybe I should make a habit of it. A little payback for all the times you've kicked my ass in a fight."

Vegeta rolled his eyes, but there was a hint of a smile on his lips. "You're just looking for any excuse to get pampered, aren't you…?"

"Maybe," Goku said, pretending to think about it. "Or maybe I just want to see you act like a gentleman for once."

"Don't push your luck." Vegeta grumbled, but there was no real annoyance in his voice. Instead, there was a familiar fondness, a light-hearted banter that had been a constant in their interactions.

"I'll try not to," Goku fell quiet for a moment, his gaze returning to Vegeta's face. The sight of him like this, the rare moments of vulnerability and softness beneath the tough exterior, it made something in his chest ache.

"But seriously…" Vegeta broke the silence, his expression fading a bit. "The disease… Is it…?"

"Oh, yeah, that." Goku's eyes widened in surprise, not expecting that question. He touched his chest absentmindedly, as if he had forgotten about it.

"Yeah. I think it's gone now, thanks to you…" He answered, a little surprised at how normal the words felt on his tongue. There was no tightness in his chest, no painful throbs. For the first time in months, he found that he could breathe easily, his lungs completely unrestricted. "Heh… You might have literally screwed it out of me."

Vegeta chuckled heartily at the joke, his concern slowly melting away, replaced by a wave of relief.

"Well, I'm glad I could be of service then," he said, his voice filled with a hint of satisfaction.

"Yeah, it's at least better than some surgery, that's for sure…" Goku offered. But then he was silent again.

Vegeta's eyes narrowed further, studying Goku intently. After a long moment, he grunted, his expression softening slightly.

His eyes flicked back down towards the stain on Goku's gown, a small smirk tugging at the corner of his lips. He was clearly enjoying the sight, taking in the signs of Goku's release on his chest.

"Looks like you made quite a mess, Kakarot," he teased, his voice low and amused.

"Oh, shut up... That's all *your* fault, y'know…" Goku pouted slightly.

"*My* fault, is it?" Vegeta raked up some of the cum from Goku's stomach onto his finger. "I seem to recall you being a very eager participant. Maybe even more eager than *me*."

He brought his finger, coated with Goku's release, up to his mouth, his eyes meeting Goku's as he slowly, almost sensually, licked the finger clean. The sight was more obscene than Goku had prepared for, a shiver running through his body at the action.

"Hmm, not bad," Vegeta hummed, a satisfied look in his eyes as he pulled back, his finger free from the mess. "You actually taste quite sweet."

Goku's cheeks flared hotter at the words, his embarrassment warring with an unexpected hint of satisfaction. No one had ever commented on the taste of him before, and the fact that it was Vegeta...

He tried to come up with a witty retort, but his brain was fuzzy, too overwhelmed by the situation and Vegeta's body surrounding him. So he ended up hiding his face against Vegeta's chest instead.

Vegeta sighed, his eyes still locked with Goku's, then added.

"In any case, we should probably clean ourselves up," he said, his voice still low and a little hoarse. "And find somewhere to rinse off. There's probably a lake or something nearby."

Goku nodded, his mind slowly starting to clear from the fog of pleasure. He was acutely aware of the stickiness and the ache in his muscles. The idea of a quick wash sounded amazing.

"Come on," Vegeta continued, gently untangling himself from Goku's embrace. He stood up, a little shakily, and held out a hand to help Goku do the same.

Goku accepted the hand, wincing a little as he stood up. His legs were a lot weaker than he'd expected, and he stumbled forward, automatically grabbing onto Vegeta for support.

"Careful, idiot." Vegeta grumbled, steadying him with a firm grip. "You're like a newborn calf. Can't even stand up straight."

"Cut me some slack," Goku retorted, his voice a little breathless as he tried to regain his balance, reaching out and grabbing his gown and boxers to pull them back on. "*You're* the one who wrecked me, remember? So just help me get to a lake already, will ya…?"

Vegeta rolled his eyes, but he didn't protest. Instead, he looped an arm around Goku's waist, supporting most of his weight as they started moving.

"Fine... You're lucky I'm in such a good mood," he muttered, his voice gruff but filled with an undercurrent of affection.

"Yeah, sure, I'm such a lucky guy." Goku scoffed with light sarcasm.

Upon exiting the cave, they took to the air, rising up above the landscape. From their vantage point, they could see a vast expanse of scenery around them, stretching out in all directions. There were rolling hills, towering trees, and rivers snaking through the terrain.

They searched the landscape, their eyes scanning the area for any signs of water. It didn't take long before they spotted a small lake nestled between two hills. It glimmered in the sunlight, its waters sparkling and inviting.

Vegeta silently guided them towards the lake, his arm firm around Goku's waist. Once they descended and landed on the shore, he helped Goku sit down on a nearby rock.

"Stay here," he instructed, his voice softer than usual. "I'll go check out the water."

Goku nodded, watching as Vegeta walked over to the lake, his bare feet kicking up small clouds of dust. The water was crystal clear, its surface calm and undisturbed. It was the perfect place to rinse off.

Vegeta slipped a hand into the water, testing its temperature. It was warm, thanks to the heat from the sun.

He let out a satisfied hum, pleased that the water wasn't too chilly. He then turned back to Goku, who was still sitting on the rock, his gaze fixed on him.

"The water's good," he announced, his voice carrying across the distance between them. "You coming?"

For a while, the two Saiyans said nothing, enjoying the companionable silence as they bathed. Vegeta took it upon himself to help Goku clean himself, washing away the traces of their passion.

Goku let him, too exhausted to protest. In fact, he found himself leaning into it, melting into Vegeta's embrace.

"You're enjoying this a little too much, aren't you?" Vegeta teased, his voice a low rumble in the quiet of the lake. He was surprisingly gentle as he washed Goku's back, tracing the ridges of his spine, the dip at the base of his back, the curve of his hips.

Goku hummed in response, his eyes half-lidded as he leaned back into Vegeta's touch. "What if I am?"

Vegeta pressed himself closer, his chest against Goku's back, his chin resting on Goku's shoulder. "You're such a hedonist."

"What's a hedonist?" Goku leaned back against him, closing his eyes.

Vegeta huffed out a slight snort, amused at Goku's ignorance. "A hedonist," he said, his tone tinged with mockery. "Someone who pursues pleasure above all else."

He punctuated his words with a light dig into Goku's side, his fingers tickling the sensitive skin.

Goku giggled a bit at the contact, clutching Vegeta's fingers.

"Hey, I'm not *that* bad, am I?" He replied tiredly.

Vegeta rolled his eyes. "Oh, please. You're the worst hedonist I've ever met. You'd spend all day eating, training, and sleeping if I let you."

He gave Goku's side another light jab, enjoying the way the other Saiyan squirmed and laughed.

Goku let himself be teased, finding amusement in Vegeta's usual snarky commentary. He laughed loudly when Vegeta jabbed him again, his body shaking against the other Saiyan's, their proximity making him strangely relaxed and content.

"Hey, can you blame me? Those are the three best things in life," he said jokingly.

"You're hopeless," Vegeta muttered, but there was a distinct lack of real irritation in his tone. Instead, it was affection that colored his words, a hint of a fond smile on his lips.

His hands continued to roam Goku's body, washing him thoroughly while also taking the opportunity to caress and explore the planes of his body.

Goku, on the other hand, was enjoying every moment of it, the warm water of the lake only adding to the sensation. Despite the exhaustion in his body, he found himself responding to Vegeta's touch, his eyes half-lidded, his body growing more lax.

"I never took you for being so clingy, Kakarot." Vegeta commented, a hint of amusement in his voice. His fingers had reached Goku's chest, skimming over the ridges of his muscles, tracing the contour of his pecs.

"I'm not clingy," Goku protested, though the whine in his voice was far from convincing. "I'm just... tired."

He leaned back further, resting his head against Vegeta's shoulder. His eyes closed as he allowed himself to savor being caressed so tenderly, so intimately. The fact that it was Vegeta made him appreciate it all the more.

"Oh, really?" Vegeta continued to glide over Goku's skin, now moving down his arms, then up to his neck. "You're not clingy, just sleepy. Is that it?"

"Mhmm," Goku hummed in response, his body practically melting against Vegeta's. He felt utterly relaxed, his brain fuzzy from the aftermath of their earlier activities. He could hardly form coherent thoughts, let alone a proper argument to defend himself from Vegeta's teasing.

Vegeta huffed in amusement at Goku's lack of a proper response. It seemed that the other Saiyan was truly spent, his body and mind completely drained.

Vegeta continued his ministrations, his hands now soothing his muscles.

"You're unusually quiet," he commented, his voice a low rumble right by Goku's ear. "I must have worn you out more than I thought."

"S'not fair," Goku murmured, his words barely above a whisper. "Ya got me all worked up, then took me apart piece by piece. I don't think my brain's workin' anymore."

He shifted a little, turning his face into the crook of Vegeta's neck, allowing himself this moment of vulnerability.

Vegeta chuckled lowly, the sound vibrating through his chest. He was enjoying this, the way Goku was open and submissive in his arms, the way he shamelessly admitted to being completely undone by their intimacy. It was a side of the other Saiyan that he rarely got to see.

"Is that so?" he retorted light-heartedly. "I didn't realize I had such a powerful affect on you."

"Always have..." Goku admitted surprisingly freely, absentmindedly resting his head against one Vegeta's pecs.

A blush spread across Vegeta's face when he heard that, but he knew it was fatigue that was making him so honest.

Despite his earlier teasing, Vegeta didn't seem all that bothered by Goku's clinginess. If anything, he was starting to find it oddly endearing. As long as Goku wasn't clinging to someone else, of course.

Goku hummed absentmindedly, his head too foggy to focus on their conversation from there. His body was heavy, his eyelids drooping, the sound of Vegeta's slow heartbeat lulling him to a state of half-consciousness.

Vegeta noticed the change in Goku's demeanour, his breathing growing slower and more rhythmic, the weight of his body growing heavier in his arms. It seemed the other Saiyan was close to falling asleep right there in his embrace.

He didn't say anything further, simply holding Goku a little tighter. Despite the exhaustion in his own body, he couldn't bring himself to move quite yet. The feeling of Goku's body pressed against his, the sound of his breathing slowly even out- it was oddly soothing.

After a while, he decided it was time to get out of the lake and get some rest. He nudged lightly at Goku, "Hey, Kakarot. You can't sleep in the water, or you'll catch a cold."

He got no response from the other Saiyan, who seemed too far gone into sleep to even register his words. Vegeta sighed but not with annoyance.

"Idiot," he muttered softly, his heart swelling with affection despite his grumbling demeanor.

His fingers idly combed through Goku's messy hair, observing the sleeping Saiyan. The sight of Goku like this, so peaceful and relaxed, was a stark contrast to his usual energetic and restless self. It was almost... cute.

A wave of affection passed through him, surprising even himself.

Carefully, he adjusted his hold on Goku's body, lifting him out of the water and onto a patch of soft grass nearby, where they had placed their clothes.

He set him down gently on the grass, his movements more careful and tender than usual. He then sat down next to him, the water dripping from his hair into the soft grass below.

The light breeze was cool against his damp skin, sending a shiver down his spine. Despite the fatigue in his muscles and bone-deep exhaustion, he found himself strangely awake. His gaze was fixed on Goku, the peaceful sight of the other Saiyan seeming to captivate him.

He was so different like this, his usual intensity dimmed by sleep. This felt... intimate, in a way.

He took a moment to dress himself, his mind still preoccupied with the sleeping Goku beside him. He once again considered waking him up but decided against it, not wanting to disturb his rest.

Instead, he carefully dressed Goku as well, mindful of his still body. He slipped the gown over Goku's head, pulling it down over his bare body, making sure his arms were through the holes. Before slipping Goku's boxers on.

The feel of Goku's skin beneath his fingers was something Vegeta found himself oddly aware of. He blushed, covering him in the blanket from before and trying to push his racing thoughts away.

Standing up with the man in his arms, he finally flew off towards Capsule Corp.

When he arrived, he was almost immediately greeted by Bulma, who was obviously waiting for news on Goku.

She rushed over, concern etched on her face. "What did Shenron say? How's Goku?"

Vegeta met her gaze, his own expression stoic but not unkind.

"He's fine now," he replied, his tone gruff but sincere. "He just needs to rest."

Bulma's eyes scanned over Goku, taking in how deeply asleep he was, how he looked almost at peace. She let out a sigh of relief, her shoulders sagging with the release of tension.

"Thank goodness," she murmured, her voice quiet. She looked up at Vegeta, an unspoken question in her eyes.

"We'll explain everything later, after he wakes up," he added, his gaze drifting back down to Goku in his arms.

Bulma nodded in response, her eyes flickering between the two Saiyans. She could tell there was more to it, could sense that something had happened, and also noticed the blood on Goku's gown, but she didn't press for details. She knew Vegeta would explain everything in his own time.

Vegeta continued on into the building, heading straight for his room. He laid him down on the bed, gently tucking the blankets around him.

As Goku slept soundly, Vegeta took a moment to look at him, his gaze soft and affectionate, a rare sight for anyone who knew Vegeta. He once again found himself running a gentle hand through Goku's hair. Despite his gruff exterior, his arrogant attitude, there was a caring side to him, a part of him that was deeply devoted to the other Saiyan. He leaned over, his lips barely grazing Goku's in a light kiss.

Vegeta's hand lingered against Goku's face for a few moments longer, his touch almost reverent. Then, with a sigh, he took a step back and sat down on the edge of the bed.

He was exhausted, not just physically, but emotionally as well. The events of the day had been nothing short of draining. He leaned back, his head hitting the pillow beside Goku as he joined him under the covers.

He didn't plan on sleeping, initially. He just needed to sit quietly for a bit, to catch his breath. But the bed was warm and soft, Goku's steady breathing a soothing rhythm beside him. Before he knew it, his own eyes were closing, the pull of sleep taking over.

Vegeta's breathing slowly evened out, his features in sleep softer and more relaxed than they usually were in wakefulness. His hand sought out Goku's, their fingers tangling together

under the blankets. Despite his initial plan of waiting for Goku to wake, he found himself drifting off regardless.

He slept deeply, his dreams filled with fragments of the day's events mixed with many distinct images. His grip on Goku's hand tightened at times, his body naturally gravitating closer in his sleep.

The two Saiyans couldn't be more at peace.

…

A/N: I hope y'all enjoyed that and think it was worth it. ;w;

It was the second smut scene I've ever written before, so I'm super nervous tbh. T0T

(Also sorry about the corny ass ending, maybe I'll rewrite it one day to make it less corny. I'm not that great with endings 😔)

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!